

Vatican office struggles to keep up with clergy abuse cases

By NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican office responsible for processing clergy sex abuse complaints has seen a record 1,000 cases reported from around the world this year, including from countries it had not heard from before — suggesting that the worst may be yet to come in a crisis that has plagued the Roman Catholic Church. Nearly two decades after the Vatican assumed responsibility for reviewing all cases of abuse, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is today overwhelmed, struggling with a skeleton staff that hasn't grown at pace to meet the four-fold increase in the number of cases arriving in 2019 compared to a decade ago. "I know cloning is against Catholic teaching, but if I could actually clone my officials and have them work three shifts a day or work seven days a week," they might make the necessary headway, said Monsignor John Kennedy, the head of the congregation's discipline section, which processes the cases. "We're effectively seeing a tsunami of cases at the moment, particularly from countries where we nev-



In this Monday, Dec. 9, 2019 photo, Monsignor John Kennedy, the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith discipline section, speaks during an interview on the terrace of the section's offices at the Vatican.

Associated Press

er heard from (before)," Kennedy said, referring to allegations of abuse that occurred for the most part years or decades ago. Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Italy and Poland have joined the U.S. among the countries with the most cases arriving at the congregation,

known as the CDF. Kennedy spoke to The Associated Press and allowed an AP photographer and video journalists into the CDF's inner chambers — the first time in the tribunal's history that visual news media have been given access. Even the Vatican's most se-

cretive institution now feels the need to show some transparency as the church hierarchy seeks to rebuild trust with rank-and-file Catholics who have grown disillusioned with decades of clergy abuse and cover-up.

Pope Francis took a step

toward showing greater transparency with his decision this week to abolish the so-called "pontifical secret" that governs the processing of abuse cases to increase cooperation with civil law enforcement.

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Continued from Front

But the CDF's struggles remain, and are emblematic of the overall dysfunction of the church's in-house legal system, which relies on bishops and religious superiors, some with no legal experience or qualified canon lawyers on staff, to investigate allegations of sexual abuse that even the most seasoned criminal prosecutors have difficulty parsing. The system itself is built on an inherent conflict of interest, with a bishop asked to weigh the claim of an unknown alleged victim against the word of a priest who he considers a spiritual son.

Despite promises of "zero tolerance" and accountability, the adoption of new laws and the creation of expert commissions, the Vatican finds itself still struggling to reckon with the problem of predator priests -- a scourge that first erupted publicly in Ireland and Australia in the 1990s, the U.S. in 2002, parts of Europe beginning in 2010 and Latin America last year.

"I suppose if I weren't a priest and if I had a child who were abused, I'd probably stop going to Mass," said Kennedy, who saw first-hand how the church in his native Ireland lost its credibility over the abuse scandal.

"I'd probably stop having anything to do with the church because I'd say, 'Well, if you can't look after children, well, why should I believe you?'"

But he said the Vatican was committed to fighting abuse and just needed more time to process the cases. "We're going to look at it forensically and guarantee that the just outcome will be given," he said in an interview.

"It's not about winning people back, because faith is something that is very personal," he added. "But at least we give people the opportunity to say, 'Well, maybe give the church a second chance to hear the message.'"

___ Located in a mustard-colored palazzo just inside the Vatican gates, the CDF serves as the cen-



In this Monday, Dec. 9, 2019 photo, Monsignor John Kennedy, the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith discipline section, looks through files at his office during an interview at the Vatican.

Associated Press

tral processing center for abuse cases as well as an appeals court for accused priests under the church's canon law, a parallel legal system to civil law enforcement that dispenses ecclesial justice.

In the past, when the CDF was known as the Holy Office or the Sacred Roman and Universal Inquisition, such church punishments involved burnings at the stake for heretics and publishing lists of banned books that the faithful were forbidden to read.

Today, CDF justice tends more toward ordering errant priests to prayer, penance and prohibition from celebrating Mass in public. In fact the worst punishment handed down by the church's canon law, even for serial child rapists, is essentially being fired, or dismissed from the clerical state.

While priests sometimes consider defrockings to be equivalent to a death sentence, such seemingly minor sanctions for such heinous crimes have long outraged victims, whose lives are forever scarred by their abuse. But recourse to church justice is sometimes all the victims have, given the statutes of limitations for pursuing criminal charges or civil litigation have often long since passed by

the time a survivor comes to terms with the trauma and decides to report the abuse to authorities -- usually to prevent further harm. "I wanted to make sure that this priest does not have access to any children," said Paul Peloquin, a Catholic clinical psychologist and abuse survivor who reported his abuser to the archdiocese of Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1990.

By then, church authorities had known for decades that the Rev. Earl Bierman groped young boys, and they had sent him off for therapy. But his bishops kept putting him back in ministry, where he is believed to have abused upwards of 70 children. A Kentucky jury convicted him in 1993 and sentenced him to 20 years in prison, where he died in 2005.

Peloquin, however, never received a reply to his initial complaint to his bishop.

"It just made me angry," said Peloquin, who now counsels victims from a faith-based perspective that emphasizes forgiveness in healing. "It seemed like they would have called me up right away and said, 'Let's hear about what you've got to say.'"

Because of cases like his, where the bishop ignored the victim, protected the pedophile and placed

the church's reputation above all else, the CDF under then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict XVI) in 2001 persuaded St. John Paul II to centralize the process.

The aim was to crack down on abusers and provide bishops and religious superiors with needed guidance to punish the priests rather than move them around from parish to parish, where they could abuse again. At no time has the Vatican ever mandated superiors report abusers to police, though it has insisted they cooperate with civil reporting laws.

The 2001 revision calls for bishops and religious superiors who receive an allegation to conduct a preliminary investigation, which in the U.S. is often done with the help of a lay review board.

If the bishop finds the claim has a semblance of truth, he sends the documentation to the CDF which tells the bishop how to proceed: via a full-blown canonical trial, a more expedited "administrative" procedure, or something else, including having the CDF itself take over the investigation.

Over the ensuing months and years, the bishop continues the investigation in consultation with the CDF. □

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Police say Texas mother found dead was strangled, baby safe

By PAUL J. WEBER
Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — More than a week after a 33-year-old Texas mother and her infant daughter vanished, authorities said Friday they found the woman dead more than 100 miles (160.93 kilometers) away but the baby safe, and have charged a suspect with kidnapping and tampering with a corpse. Heidi Broussard and her 1-month-old daughter, Margo Carey, were last seen Dec. 12 in their hometown of Austin, Texas, after Broussard dropped off an older child at an elementary school. Their abrupt disappearance drew national attention, and authorities now say the search appears to have ended with the baby being found alive but her mother dead at a home near Houston. Broussard's body was positively identified by the Harris County Institute of Forensic Science, which called her death a homicide by strangulation. Although police had a person in custody, by Friday evening they had not announced any murder charges.

"Although we are grateful that it appears as though we have safely recovered baby Margo, again we do believe Miss Broussard lost her life in this incident," Aus-

tin Police Chief Brian Manley told reporters at a news conference. Manley said the person arrested in connection with the case had been charged with two counts of kidnapping and one count of tampering with a corpse. But he refused to disclose the person's identity, citing the ongoing investigation, even while acknowledging that a name and picture was already being widely distributed by multiple media outlets.

Bond for the suspect was set at \$600,000.

Authorities said the baby found at the house looked like Broussard's child but were still awaiting DNA tests. The baby was described as being found "healthy" and placed in the custody of Texas Child Protective Services.

Tammy Broussard, Heidi's mother, earlier told NBC News that police told her the body was likely that of her daughter and that the body was found in the trunk of a car at the home in the Houston suburb of Jersey Village, about 130 miles (209 kilometers) southeast of Austin.

Austin police Detective Brad Herries said that after receiving numerous tips, a lead was generated this week that led to a "location of interest" in

the Houston area. He said investigators zeroed in on a residence and detained a person outside the residence Thursday, and then obtained a search warrant to search the cars and residence.

Manley said there may be additional charges in the case as the investigation continues. □



In this Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2019 photo, FBI agents canvas the neighborhood searching for information on Heidi Broussard, a missing Austin, Texas, woman and her infant daughter in South Austin, Texas.

Associated Press



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Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., speaks during a Democratic presidential primary debate Thursday, Dec. 19, 2019, in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

Female candidates asked for forgiveness. Men, not so much

By **TAMARA LUSH**
Associated Press

In the final question of Thursday's Democratic presidential debate, the seven candidates were asked whether they would rather give a gift to someone on the stage. Or, they could ask for forgiveness.

Their responses were the stuff of linguistics and gender studies.

The men — Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders, Andrew Yang, Pete Buttigieg and Tom Steyer — opted to give a gift. None remarked on how forcefully they tried to make a point, nor did they acknowledge their anger or passion about the issues during the two-and-a-half hour debate to become the Democratic presidential nominee.

But the two women, Elizabeth Warren and Amy Klobuchar, asked for forgiveness. Each apologized for, well, debating.

"I know that sometimes, um, I get really worked up, and sometimes I get a little hot. I don't really mean to," Warren said.

Said Klobuchar: "I would ask for forgiveness any time any of you get mad at me. I can be blunt."

Gender and linguists experts weren't surprised by their choices.

"These women are brilliant and accomplished, and they deserve to be on that

stage, and yet, they still feel the need to back off because they fear they have maybe been too direct, too blunt, too passionate," said Sally Helgesen, an author, speaker and women's leadership coach.

There's still a double standard between when it comes to communication and gender. Men are expected to be forceful, passionate and bold. Women who choose to communicate in a similar fashion are criticized for being strident, shrill or worse.

And yet, by asking for forgiveness — essentially apologizing for arguing their points forcefully — the women candidates could be seen by some voters as weak or backing down. It's a predicament, linguist Deborah Tannen said — and their answers address one of the liabilities of being a female candidate.

"Strident is a word attached to women, but never attached to men," she said, pointing out Klobuchar's statement about others getting "mad" at her. "Can you imagine any of those guys saying that?"

Professor Karina Schumann of the University of Pittsburgh, who did her doctoral thesis on why women apologize more often than men, said many women are more sensitive to harming others. They're socially at-

tuned, and want to make sure conversations run smoothly.

In a debate setting, "to apologize for that kind of behavior is really interesting. It served to maintain the image of them being feminine, it's conforming to those types of gender roles expected of women."

All three experts pointed out that Secretary of State and 2016 presidential candidate Hillary Clinton was criticized and mocked during her campaign for not being feminine enough.

"Women tend to get socially punished for not being warm," said Schumann.

It was also telling, Schumann said, for the men in Thursday's debate to all choose gift giving.

"Giving a gift is a warm, pro-social behavior. You're a benefactor, helping someone. You're in a more powerful role," she said. "The benefit of the perceptions of their warmth doesn't come at any cost to perceptions of competence."

Tannen did say that there was one way Klobuchar and Warren were exactly like the men onstage.

"They went on to say how great they were," she said. But the two women couched it in an apology, attributing an asking of forgiveness to: "I care so much about what's happening." □

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Police surveillance planes to fly above Baltimore in 2020

By REGINA GARCIA CANO
Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — The city of Baltimore will be monitored by surveillance airplanes for up to six months next year under a pilot program announced Friday that is aimed at helping law enforcement investigate violent crime and that will effectively restart a tactic secretly used three years ago.

The flights, which civil liberties groups oppose, will start in May and gather footage during the hours when the city experiences high rates of crime. The announcement marks a reversal for Baltimore Police Commissioner Michael Harrison, who previously expressed skepticism over the use of the planes and described the idea as an "untested" crime-fighting strategy.

"We will be the first American city to use this technology in an attempt to solve and deter violent crime," Harrison said at a news conference. He said he believes they could prove to be "yet another tool" to fight the violence plaguing the city.

The three planes will fly simultaneously, covering about 90 percent of the city, said Baltimore police spokesman Matt Jablow. The resolution of the footage won't be sharp enough for officers to identify faces, but should help them track movement and action.

The testing will align with the city's historically most violent months and will be focused on homicides, shootings and robberies, including carjackings. Harrison said police will not have access to live feeds, and instead, officers will receive

"evidence packages" of specific crimes that have already been reported.

Footage from the pilot program will not be used in cases of police misconduct.

Baltimore is experiencing one of its most violent years on record, with more than 330 homicides so far. That's up from 309 total in 2018. The city has also seen more than 1,310 armed and unarmed commercial robberies and carjackings. It wrapped up last year with 1,361 of those cases.

Harrison acknowledged the controversial history of the planes and promised a series of yet-to-be-scheduled public meetings to inform the community "on how the program will and will not be used going forward."

In 2016, under a different police commissioner, the department hoped to quietly gather crime scene information using the aerial surveillance tactic. Top city officials were unaware that Ohio-based Persistent Surveillance Systems was trying out its technology over Baltimore until Bloomberg Businessweek revealed it.

Over months, the company captured roughly 300 hours of images. Analysts then zoomed in on crime scenes, moving backward and forward in time among the images to see suspects arriving and getting away. The footage was captured using a bank of cameras mounted inside a small Cessna airplane flown at roughly 8,000 feet (2,400 meters) above the city.

Ross McNutt, president and owner of the company as listed on its website, told The Associated Press the technology provided

through the Community Support Program — "helps solve otherwise unsolvable crimes," particularly homicides. He said it has a well-developed privacy program with external oversight.

"During the short test in 2016, in the equivalent of two weeks of flying, we watched five murders and 18 shootings and provided that information to investigators. We look forward to supporting the people of Baltimore in their efforts to reduce major crime and we look forward to doing so in a very open and transparent way" that protects people's rights, McNutt said by phone.

City Solicitor Andre Davis on Friday said Baltimore's law department is "entirely comfortable" with the planned test, whose cost Harrison said will be covered by philanthropic funds, not tax dollars. He said he has been in contact with the foundation of Texas billionaires Laura and John Arnold, who funded the 2016 tryout through a donation to the Baltimore Community Foundation, a nonprofit civic organization.

The Arnold Foundation did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Harrison said Mayor Bernard "Jack" Young, who is hoping to convince voters to choose him from a growing field of mayor candidates, did not pressure him into agreeing to test the technology. But his decision instantaneously drew condemnation from within and outside city hall.

"When you don't have a (crime-fighting) plan, you reach for boxing rings. You



City solicitor Andre Davis, left, listens as Baltimore Police Commissioner Michael Harrison, right, announces support for a pilot program that uses surveillance planes over the city to combat crime on Friday, Dec. 20, 2019, in Baltimore.

Associated Press

hope for cold weather. You say you'll put a surveillance plane up in the sky that does not work," City Council President Brandon Scott, who wants to unseat Young, said in a statement. "We need solutions that work, and Commissioner Harrison has told the City Council multiple times this year, as recently as October, that there is no evidence the surveillance plane is an effective crime-fighting tool."

The American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland and the Coalition for Justice, Safety and Jobs in a joint statement said Harrison's deci-

sion to reverse course is a "fateful step" that will affect the privacy rights of people of color in Baltimore. The organizations added that a decision that carries long-term impacts should be made by an elected body, not by the police commissioner.

"The surveillance plane means putting every resident of Baltimore under permanent surveillance, creating a video record of everywhere that everyone goes every time they walk outside," they said. "If the police did that in real life, in person on our streets, we would never accept it." □

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Navy, Army probes find no racism intent in hand gestures

By LOLITA C. BALDOR

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hand gestures flashed by West Point cadets and Naval Academy midshipmen during the televised Army-Navy football game were not racist signals, military investigations have concluded. A Navy probe of the event found that the students were participating in a "sophomoric game" on Saturday and had no racist intent.

An Army statement Friday also rejected any racist overtones, saying the hand gestures were "not associated with ideologies or movements that are contrary to the Army values."

The Navy said officials are, however, disappointed in the immature behavior of the students and "their actions will be appropriately addressed." There were no details about their exact punishment, but a Navy report on the investigation said the two midshipmen should face "administrative action" for "failure to use good judgment."

Clips of the hand gestures by the students went viral on social media and immediately raised questions about whether they were using a "white power" sign. But others suggested it



In this Dec. 14, 2019 file photo, Navy midshipmen march onto field ahead of an NCAA college football game between the Army and the Navy in Philadelphia.

Associated Press

was part of what's called the "circle game," in which someone flashes an upside-down OK sign below the waist and punches anyone who looks at it.

The Navy said that reviews of the footage, more than two dozen interviews and background checks by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and the FBI determined that the two freshmen midshipmen were participating in the "circle game" with West Point cadets.

The investigation added that the two naval academy students "exhibited genuine shock" and said they were not aware of the racist connotation of the hand gestures. It said interviews with friends, roommates and other commanders also found no links to the white power movement.

Navy Adm. Mike Gilday, chief of naval operations, said sailors are expected to conduct themselves with integrity and character at all times.

"To be clear, the Navy does not tolerate racism in any form," said Gilday. "And while the investigation determined there was no racist intent behind these actions, our behavior must be professional at all times and not give cause for others to question our core values of honor, courage and commitment."

The Navy investigation also made a number of recommendations to better coordinate and screen midshipmen who may be in high vis-

ibility areas for major events such as the game day. And it said there should be more training for the students on how they should conduct themselves.

The U.S. Military Academy at West Point reached similar conclusions. Lt. Gen. Darryl Williams, West Point superintendent, expressed disappointment in the cadets' immature behavior. The cadets involved also will receive "appropriate administrative" or disciplinary actions, West Point said. No details were provided.

"The American people trust our Soldiers to do the right things the right way," said Gen. James McConville, chief of staff of the Army. "We must be mindful of behavior which brings that trust into question and ensure our actions meet the high ethical and professional standards our nation expects the American Soldier to uphold."

The circle game, around for generations, was featured in the early 2000s sitcom "Malcolm in the Middle" and has made a resurgence as a photo bomb prank in sports team photos—along the same line as "bunny ears" fingers. In more recent years, it became an internet meme in a online game of "gotcha." □

Bill introduced to redesignate Jimmy Carter historic sites

ATLANTA (AP) — Some historic places in former President Jimmy Carter's hometown may get more federal protection under a bill introduced by Georgia's congressional delegation to give them a new designation.

The legislation would reclassify the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site located in rural Plains, Georgia, as the Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.

Both national historic sites and national historical parks are protected parts of the U.S. National Park System, but "National historical parks are commonly areas of greater physical extent and complexity than national historic sites,"



In this Nov. 3, 2019 file photo, former President Jimmy Carter teaches Sunday school at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga.

Associated Press

according to the National Park Service.

The new designation would apply to the farm where Carter grew up, the

high school that he and former first lady Rosalynn Carter attended and the Plains train depot, which served as his presidential

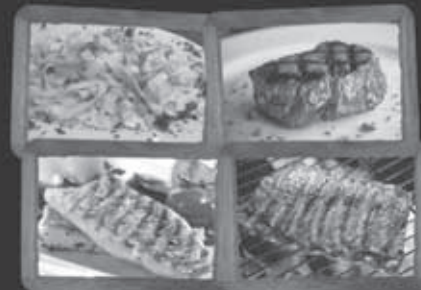
campaign headquarters, according to a news release from Republican Sen. David Perdue's office. The park would also eventually include the Carters' current residence and gravesites.

"No matter where life has taken me, from the Governor's mansion to the White House, Plains has always been my home," the 95-year-old Democrat and former president in a statement. "Rosalynn joins me in thanking Senators Perdue and Isakson, Congressman Bishop, and the Georgia delegation for helping preserve my family's legacy." The goal of the change is to help protect the sites and to draw more visitors

to Plains to learn about Carter and his legacy, officials said.

A policy advisor for Perdue said that designating the area as a national historical park would make it clearer to the public that the park incorporates multiple sites, and officials hope that it could ultimately lead to an increase in visitors. The change would not affect the park's management structure or boundaries.

"Today, Plains, Georgia is a living monument to the Carters and their lifetime of service. I'm proud to stand with the entire Georgia delegation to ensure President Carter's legacy is preserved for generations to come," Perdue said. □

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MS-13 arrests deal blow to gang leadership on Long Island

By JIM MUSTIAN and MICHAEL BALSAMO
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Authorities said Friday they have dealt an unprecedented blow to the violent MS-13 street gang, announcing charges against nearly 100 of the group's members and associates on Long Island.

Suffolk County District Attorney Timothy Sini revealed a sweeping indictment that he said "decimated" the gang's leadership and drug suppliers on Long Island. He described the case as the largest of its kind against MS-13 in New York, where the gang has been blamed for dozens of killings since 2016.

The two-year investigation by state and federal authorities thwarted more than a half-dozen murder plots, Sini said, and also provided authorities insights into the gang's structure and recruiting patterns. The investigation was bolstered by an expansive wire tap in which the authorities monitored calls from more than 200 phone numbers.

Gang members on Long Island conspired with colleagues from as far away as Europe and Oklahoma, collecting cash from drug sales and sending that money to the organization's leaders in El Salvador, according to the 77-count indictment handed up Monday.

The gang feuded against rivals and would even kill its own members who showed signs of disloyalty or failed to perform "required tasks" such as paying dues or traf-

ficking drugs and weapons, the indictment says.

"MS-13 is a ruthless, savage gang," Sini said at a news conference, pointing to a machete recovered by law enforcement, the gang's signature weapon. "They will attempt to recalibrate and send individuals to take up leadership roles in Suffolk County.

That's why we have to stay vigilant."

Authorities said they seized more than 10 kilograms of cocaine, hundreds of fentanyl pills, drug ledgers, long guns and other firearms, and more than \$200,000 cash. Those taken into custody included the leaders of nine so-called "cliques" — factions of MS-13.

"What you're hearing from us today is that we're more committed than ever to eradicate this gang," Sini said. "Is the battle over? Absolutely not."

MS-13, also known as Mara Salvatrucha, is considered one of the top transnational organized crime threats in the United States. Violence committed by the gang, including the 2016 slayings of two teenage girls, helped spark an aggressive effort by the FBI and the U.S. Justice Department to dismantle the gang.

President Donald Trump, who visited Long Island in July 2017 to address the gang problem, has blamed the violence and gang growth on lax immigration policies.

Investigators have made dozens of arrests of suspected gang members in recent years as part of a



Suffolk County District Attorney Timothy Sini holds a machete while announcing an indictment of nearly 100 MS-13 gang members and associates during a news conference at Suffolk County Court in Riverhead, N.Y., Friday, Dec. 20, 2019.

Associated Press

crackdown on MS-13. In 2017, police arrested 15 MS-13 members on murder and other charges following a spate of bloodshed that included the massacre of four young men in a Long Island park and the killing of a suspected gang rival inside a deli.

"Their rules are violence, fear and control of their territory," said Ray Donovan, special agent in charge of

the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration in New York. "We will continue to push them back."

MS-13 recruits young teenagers from El Salvador and Honduras, though many gang members were born in the U.S. Long Island has a large population of unaccompanied minors from Central America, including many who were fleeing the violence in their home na-

tions.

MS-13 is believed to have been founded as a neighborhood street gang in Los Angeles in the mid-1980s by immigrants fleeing a civil war in El Salvador. El Salvador's Supreme Court defined the gang as a terrorist group in 2015, allowing courts there to give tougher sentences to its members.

— Michael Balsamo reported from Washington. □

UK charges US diplomat's wife over teen's death in crash

By JILL LAWLESS

Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — An American diplomat's wife who left the U.K. after being involved in a road accident that killed a British teenager has been charged with causing death by dangerous driving, British prosecutors said Friday.

The Crown Prosecution Service said it had begun extradition proceedings against Anne Sacoolas.

The decision to charge Sacoolas, who has claimed diplomatic immunity, has caused tensions between the U.K. and the United States. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab welcomed the move but the State Department called it unhelpful.

British police say 19-year-old motorcycle rider Harry Dunn died in August when he was hit by a car driven by Sacoolas, whose husband was an intelligence officer at RAF Croughton, a military base in central England used by U.S. forces. Sacoolas claimed diplomatic immunity and left



The family of Harry Dunn, from left, mother Charlotte Charles, stepfather Bruce Charles, family spokesman Radd Seiger, father Tim Dunn and stepmother Tracey Dunn speak to the media outside the Ministry Of Justice in London, Friday, Dec. 20, 2019.

Associated Press

Britain after the crash.

Dunn's family has urged her to return and face British justice, and met with U.S. President Donald Trump in Washington as part of their campaign.

Britain's prosecution service said it had authorized police to charge Sacoolas with causing death by dangerous driving — which carries a maximum sentence of 14 years in prison — "fol-

lowing a thorough review of the evidence available." Prosecutors said they had begun extradition proceedings although it is up to the government to formally ask through diplo-

matic channels for Sacoolas to be sent back to Britain.

Sacoolas's lawyer, Amy Jeffress, said her client had co-operated fully with the investigation but "will not return voluntarily to the United Kingdom to face a potential jail sentence for what was a terrible but unintentional accident."

"We made that promise to him the night we lost him to seek justice, thinking it was going to be really easy," she said. "We had no idea it was going to be this hard and it would take this long, but we really feel it is one huge step towards that promise we made Harry."

The tragedy has caused a diplomatic dispute between Britain and the U.S. over Sacoolas' legal status. Under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, families of diplomats are granted immunity from arrest or detention. British prosecutors maintain that immunity does not apply to dependants of consular officials based outside of London. □

UK lawmakers set to vote on Boris Johnson's Brexit bill

By JILL LAWLESS

Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British lawmakers are set to hold their first major vote on Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Brexit bill Friday. It is all but certain to be approved by

the country's new Conservative-dominated Parliament. The vote to approve the Withdrawal Agreement Bill in principle will set Britain on course to leave the European Union as scheduled on Jan. 31. That was the



In this photo made available by the UK Parliament, Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson, center, attends the debate in the House of Commons, London, Thursday Dec. 19, 2019.

Associated Press

key campaign promise of Johnson, who won a commanding parliamentary majority in last week's U.K. general election.

Previous attempts to pass a Brexit deal through the U.K. Parliament foundered as lawmakers objected to sections of the agreement and demanded a bigger say in the process. But Johnson's victory gives him

the power to get his way. The bill commits Britain to leaving the EU on Jan. 31 and to concluding trade talks with the bloc by the end of 2020. Trade experts and EU officials say striking a free trade deal within 11 months will be a struggle, but Johnson insists he won't agree to any more delays, and the bill has been amended to bar ministers

from agreeing to extend the transition period with the EU.

That has set off alarm bells among businesses, who fear that means the country will face a "no-deal" Brexit at the start of 2021.

Johnson has stripped out parts of the bill which gave lawmakers a role in negotiating a future trade deal with the EU and required ministers to provide regular updates to Parliament. The clauses were added earlier in the year in an attempt to win opposition lawmakers' support -- backing that Johnson no longer needs. The bill is expected to complete its passage through Parliament in January, in time for Britain to leave the 28-nation bloc on Jan. 31. The divorce deal also needs to be ratified by the European Parliament. European Parliament vice president Pedro Silva Pereira said officials expect that to happen by Jan. 29. □

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Climate activists win final victory in Dutch court ruling

By MIKE CORDER

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands

(AP) — Climate activists won a final victory Friday in their long-running battle through Dutch courts to force the government to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

The country's highest court upheld two earlier rulings ordering the government to cut emissions by at least 25% by the end of 2020 from benchmark 1990 levels.

Activists in the packed courtroom clapped and cheered as Presiding Judge Kees Streefkerk said the court had rejected the government's appeal.

Urgenda, the Dutch climate and sustainability organization that filed the original case hailed the ruling as "a groundbreaking decision that confirms that individual governments must do their fair share to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

Faiza Oulahsen, of Greenpeace in the Netherlands, called it "an immense victory for climate justice."

It is now more than four years since a court in The Hague first ordered the emissions cut in a case brought by Urgenda that spawned similar legal challenges elsewhere in the



Climate activists gather outside the Supreme Court of the Netherlands, The Hague, on Friday Dec. 20, 2019, ahead of a ruling in a landmark case in which the government was ordered to slash greenhouse gas emissions by 25% by 2020.

Associated Press

world. The government appealed that verdict, saying that courts shouldn't be able to order the government to take action. The government lost the appeal in October 2018, but appealed again, this time to the Supreme Court.

Friday's ruling rejected that appeal, saying the Dutch government must act "on account of the risk of dangerous climate change that could also have a serious impact on the rights to

life and well-being of residents of the Netherlands." Damian Rau, one of the plaintiffs that filed the case with Urgenda, said the Supreme Court decision "will set the action we so urgently need into motion and will force governments into taking their responsibility. The judgment is an example to the world that no one is powerless and everybody can make a difference."

In the meantime, the Neth-

erlands is approaching the target.

A report by the country's Environmental Assessment Agency published last month estimated that greenhouse gas emissions in 2020 would be about 23% lower than 1990 levels. The agency said that the reduction could be anywhere from 19%-26%.

Scientists say global emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants have to start falling rapidly as

soon as possible to meet the Paris goal of keeping global warming by the end of the century well below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit), and ideally 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 F).

Earlier this year, the Dutch government announced what it called a climate agreement -- a raft of measures intended to cut emissions by 49% by 2030. But it appears unlikely the action already underway will be enough to meet the goal set by the courts in the Urgenda case.

Recently, the government has stepped up action to limit pollution -- including reducing the maximum speed limit on highways from 130 kph (80 mph) to 100 kph (62 mph) from early next year.

Friday's ruling came a day after Swiss authorities announced that environmental activists in the Alpine country had collected enough signatures to force a referendum on setting specific goals for combating climate change in the constitution.

The original June 2015 ruling came in a case brought by the environmental group Urgenda on behalf of 900 Dutch citizens concerned about government inaction on climate change. □

Syrian troops make new push into rebel-held northwest Idlib

By AJ NADDAFF

Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) —

Government troops Friday captured four villages in Syria's northwest as part of a new ground offensive to push into rebel-held Idlib province, Syria's military and opposition activists said. The offensive has already forced thousands of civilians to abandon their homes and flee for their lives.

Overnight, government forces and its Russian ally launched hundreds of air and ground strikes on the southern and eastern countryside of Idlib, according to the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights, apparently paving the



In this frame grab from video taken on Friday, Dec. 20, 2019, militants of the Al Qaida-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham try to disperse people who have gathered at the Bab al-Hawa border gate to protest the ongoing bombing campaign in Syria's rebel-controlled Idlib province by the government and its Russian ally.

Associated Press

way for the ground push. Residents and activists reported incessant bombing

over the last few days. In a widely circulated video, a resident of Maaret al-

Numan, a town southeast of the rebel-held enclave that has been heavily targeted in the last few days, pleaded for help to evacuate the area. He asked for vehicles. "It has been a hard and difficult night for the people of Maaret al-Numan," the unidentified man said. "Whoever can come and get us out please." Hundreds of displaced marched to the border crossing with Turkey, demanding access to safety and calling for an end to the violence. The militants who dominate Idlib opened fire over their heads to disperse them. Syrian state media posted pictures of troops in Um Jalal, one of the four vil-

lages they captured and which lies southeast of Maaret al-Numan.

The Observatory said at least 11 civilians were killed in Maaret al-Numan and its suburbs and farther north since Thursday.

Before this latest bout of violence, the U.N. reported that some 60,000 Idlib residents had been displaced in recent weeks by the government offensive.

Syrian government forces have been slowly chipping away at the rebel-held Idlib, despite a fragile Russian-brokered ceasefire in September 2019. The overstretched Syrian army has been waging a limited offensive against the province. □

Croatia holds tight presidential vote before EU chairmanship

By **DARKO BANDIC**
JOVANA GEC

Associated Press

ZAGREB, Croatia (AP) —

Croatia is holding a tight presidential election this weekend that is seen as a test for the conservative government only days before the European Union's newest member state takes over the bloc's presidency for the first time.

President Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic is running for a second term at Sunday's vote facing a leftist former prime minister Zoran Milanovic, right-wing challenger Miroslav Skoro and eight others.

The three front-runners are polling close to one another and analysts believe that the victor will be decided in a runoff on Jan. 5 since no single candidate is expected to win outright with a majority of votes.

Keeping the presidency is important for the ruling conservative Croatian Democratic Union party as its government prepares to assume the EU chairmanship that will include presiding over Brexit and the start of post-Brexit negotiations. Here is a look at both the upcoming presidential ballot and Croatia's EU presidency:

WHO ARE THE MAIN CANDIDATES?

Grabar-Kitarovic, the incumbent, has been shaken after making an array of



In this Thursday, Dec. 19, 2019 photo, presidential candidate Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic, left, and prime minister Andrej Plenkovic greet supporters at a rally in Zagreb, Croatia.

Associated Press

gaffes during the campaign. Croatia's first female president, she is known for flirting with the extreme right while also seeking to portray herself as an easy-going peoples' president who doesn't shy away from singing in public, for example. Her main opponent is Milanovic, who is backed by the liberal opposition. Outspoken and populist in style, Milanovic has accused the ruling party of widespread corruption and of turning Croatia toward right-wing nationalism in the past several years.

WHO ELSE IS RUNNING?

Also in the race is national-

ist pop-folk singer Skoro, a right-wing candidate who is trailing closely to the two other front-runners.

He is believed to be chipping away the right-wing votes from Grabar Kitarovic. Skoro said he would pardon a convicted war criminal if he wins, fueling nationalism stemming from the 1991-95 war that erupted after Croatia split from the former Yugoslavia.

The remaining candidates include former judge Mislav Kolakusic and several others.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

Deeply divided among the left and right, Croats seem

united in focusing on living standards. Although Croatia joined the EU in 2013, it is still lagging more developed nations in the bloc.

The country of 4.2 million people relies heavily on the tourism industry along the popular Adriatic Sea coast. However, rural areas have been emptying on an alarming scale with people leaving for more prosperous EU countries such as Germany or Ireland.

The issue has become one of the most burning problems with more than 15 percent of Croats living and working abroad.

WHAT DID THE CAMPAIGN

LOOK LIKE?

The campaign has been marked by Grabar Kitarovic's blunders that included promising jobs on an 8,000-euro (\$8,900) salary or saying she would bring cakes to the Zagreb mayor in prison if he is jailed for corruption.

Mocked on social networks and in the media, Grabar Kitarovic's position appeared shaken as the election drew closer.

Milanovic, her leftist challenger, has pledged a "normal" and tolerant Croatia if he wins, while right-wing Skoro wants to send the army to stop the migrant influx — a move that would add to criticism of Croatia's alleged brutal treatment of people seeking to reach Western Europe.

CAN THE ELECTION RESULT AFFECT THE EU PRESIDENCY?

The presidency in Croatia holds no executive power — the president formally commands the army and represents the country abroad — so the outcome of the vote on Sunday doesn't directly change anything.

But if an opposition candidate wins, that could weaken the conservative government as it takes over the important job at the EU. The government recently has faced a massive education strike that also has dented the governing alliance. □

EU funds help Kosovo fight unhealthy air pollution

By **FLORENT BAJRAMI**
LLAZAR SEMINI

Associated Press

PRISTINA, Kosovo (AP) —

The European Union is investing more than 80 million euros (\$89 million) to improve the air quality in Kosovo, whose capital of Pristina is choking from pollution by coal-based power plants, coal and wood heating in homes and old vehicles on the roads.

Luigi Brusa of the European Union office in Kosovo on Friday said during the last few days the air in Pristina was like that of Beijing, considered one of the most polluted cities in the world.



Traffic moves along Bill Clinton Boulevard during smog and heavy air pollution in Kosovo capital Pristina, on Friday, Dec. 20, 2019.

Associated Press

The U.S. embassy's air quality monitor has shown PM2.5

pollution levels higher than 50, considered the maxi-

mum level accepted, rising up to 213 on Sunday. School children on Friday wore masks when walking to schools in the foggy capital.

To highlight the problems, air masks were also put on statues of Mother Teresa and former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Nysrete Doda, a Pristina resident walking her child to school, said even the air in her home was bad because she had forgotten to close a window overnight. "It is better that children and old people do not go out of home, but they (children) have to," she complained.

Smoke from the Kosova B power plant in Obiliq, 10 kilometers (6 miles) from Pristina create a regular cloud over the capital.

The EU is also investing 7 million euros (\$7.6 million) to increase the capacity of the central Termokos heating system for 2,000 more households, or about 10,000 residents, including schools and kindergartens. Outgoing Environment Minister Fatmir Matoshi says public institutions do not use coal for heating anymore and giving coal sacks to power corporation employees as a reward has stopped. □

Sri Lankan leader says he became victim in abduction claim

By KRISHAN FRANCIS

Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP)

— Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said Thursday that he has become the victim in the alleged abduction of a Swiss Embassy employee who was reportedly threatened and sexually abused to disclose embassy-related information.

Rajapaksa said reports of the alleged abduction appeared in foreign media before the facts were established, and critics accused his government of carrying it out.

"Now it is very clear. Actually in this case the victim is me, it is not that lady," Rajapaksa said in comments to foreign media.

"It is very clear that it is a planned thing to discredit me and the government," he said.

"Over the years they were talking about white vans and all the abductions. Now they want to say immediately after my elec-



In this Nov. 22, 2019, file photo, Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, center, speaks with his cabinet colleagues in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Associated Press

tion this was taking place," Rajapaksa said.

The Swiss foreign ministry has called the alleged Nov. 25 abduction of embassy employee a "very serious and unacceptable attack"

and summoned Sri Lanka's ambassador to demand an investigation. It also criticized a lack of due process in the case.

Police have detained the embassy employee pend-

ing charges that she made statements to create disaffection toward the government and fabricated evidence.

Rajapaksa says evidence collected by investigators

doesn't match her' account.

Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis phoned his Sri Lankan counterpart, Dinesh Gunawardena, on Wednesday to discuss the case. He's sending former Ambassador Joerg Frieden to Colombo to help resolve the dispute over the alleged "security incident."

A Swiss foreign ministry statement said Thursday that Cassis told Gunawardena that "the health and security of staff is of priority" to the Swiss foreign ministry and the Sri Lankan authorities are responsible for protecting them going forward.

Cassis also expressed regret that the judge had ordered the local staff member put in investigative detention. "The circumstances in prison do not consider her state of health," the ministry said. Cassis also asked Gunawardena to allow her to be moved to an appropriate location, such as a hospital. □

Is Russia eyeing Belarus takeover? Integration talks deepen

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV

Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The presidents of Belarus and Russia met Friday to discuss deeper economic ties between the two close allies amid mounting concerns in the Belarusian capital of Minsk that Moscow ultimately wants to subdue its neighbor.

The meeting in the Russian city of St. Petersburg was the second encounter this month between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his long-time Belarusian counterpart, Alexander Lukashenko.

Greeting Lukashenko at the start of Friday's talks, Putin said some progress on resolving outstanding issues has been made. But Russian Economics Minister Maxim Oreshkin said after the talks the two sides had failed to resolve key differences over oil and gas.

The negotiations have triggered opposition protests in Belarus, where many fear that closer ties with



Demonstrators with old Belarusian flags march to protest closer integration with Russia, which protesters fear could erode the post-Soviet independence of Belarus, in downtown in Minsk, Belarus, Friday, Dec. 20, 2019.

Associated Press

Russia could weaken Belarus' independence. Such concerns were fueled by Moscow's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and its support for a separatist insurgency in

eastern Ukraine. Over 1,000 demonstrators rallied in the Belarusian capital Minsk on Friday, holding placards that read "First Crimea, then Belarus" and "Stop Annexation!"

Putin, who marks two decades in power later this month, has remained coy about his political future after his current presidential term ends in 2024. He dodged a question Thurs-

day if he could potentially extend his rule by shifting into a new governing position to become the head of a union between Russia and Belarus.

The idea alarms some residents of Belarus.

"We will not allow Putin to become the president of a new Russia-Belarus state in 2024. We will never come back to the empire," said Pavel Severinets, the organizer of Friday's protest in Minsk.

Police allowed the unsanctioned protest to proceed unimpeded, even though Belarusian authorities routinely crack down on opposition rallies.

"Lukashenko doesn't want to become a Russian provincial governor," said 20-year-old student Pyotr Rudkevich, one of the protesters on Friday.

Russia and Belarus signed a union agreement in 1997 that envisaged close political, economic and military ties, but stopped short of forming a single nation. □

Venezuela's Christmas lights glow after a dark year

By SCOTT SMITH

Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)

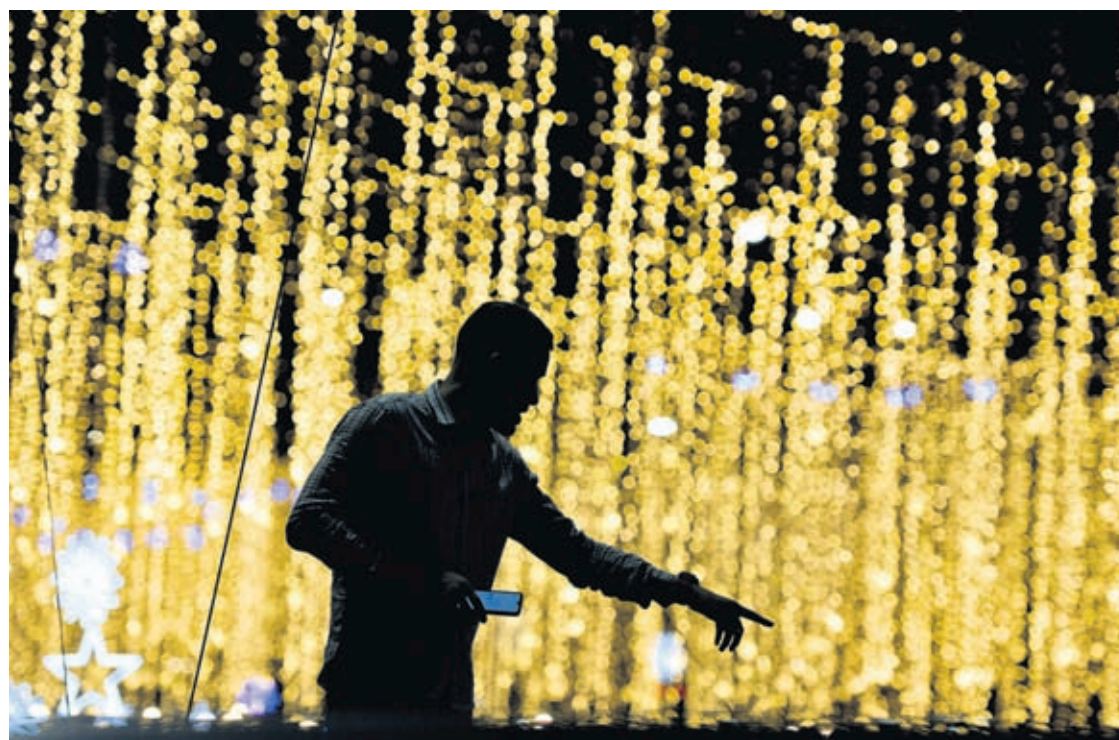
— After a tumultuous year in Venezuela with unprecedented blackouts, the country's government has put up brilliant displays of Christmas lights, trying to spread a little holiday cheer.

Cars filled with families have choked a Caracas avenue as Christmas approaches to see one of the displays President Nicolas Maduro's government has strung over the Guaire River.

Not everybody was impressed. Barreling through traffic, one driver shouted sarcastically from his car window: "And people say there's a crisis in Venezuela!" The lights glow as people still have painful memories from March, when the nation went dark for four days in the nation's worst-ever power failure. Millions outside the capital still go without lights — or any electricity — a good part of each day.

Guadalupe Fares, 36, took her two young children with her to gaze up at the millions of lights. She said she wanted to feel a normal life, at least for a few moments, but acknowledged mixed feelings..

"It's kind of bizarre because



A man speaks with his girlfriend as they tour the Christmas lights strung over El Guaire River in Caracas, Venezuela, late Thursday, Dec. 19, 2019.

Associated Press

you see so many people in need," she said. "But at the same time, people are enjoying themselves."

Maduro's socialist government has staged more than 20 light displays across the capital of Caracas and several others in cities throughout the country.

The most stunning Christmas display is in Las Mercedes district, famous for upscale restaurants and pulsing nightlife. Strings of lights — reportedly 5 million of them — stretch for a city

block over the Guaire River, notoriously polluted with Caracas sewage.

Packed cars cruised past with their windows rolled down, while children poked their heads through sunroofs for a better look. Families on foot strolled a walkway, stopping to squeeze in for selfies.

Residents say they don't recall such extravagant light displays previously, especially in the last few years as the once-wealthy oil nation has spiraled into politi-

cal and economic crisis.

In most Caracas neighborhoods families shun the streets at night for fear of crime, and drivers keep their windows rolled up while carefully navigating around open manholes hidden in darkness.

Most homes don't have reliable water and drivers wait for hours, sometimes days, in most of the country to gas up — despite Venezuela having the world's largest reserves of oil.

Venezuela's bitter political

fight hasn't taken a Christmas holiday. Maduro's Culture Minister Ernesto Villegas shot back at critics of the light decorations on Twitter, saying everybody raved in 2006, when then-popular opposition Gov. Henrique Capriles decorated the same stretch of river. "The unruly right is quick to criticize our Christmas lights on El Guaire in 2019," Villegas tweeted. "But it seemed pleasant enough when @hcapriles lit up Las Mercedes in 2006."

Critics of Maduro blame decades of corrupt socialist rule for failing to maintain the nation's power grid and other crumbling infrastructure.

For his part, Maduro has accused the "imperialist" United States of launching cyberattacks on the nation's power grid as part of a coup attempt to install opposition leader Juan Guaidó as president and exploit the nation's vast oil reserves.

Office worker Williams Chang, 34, walked with his family along a wide boulevard decorated with giant, illuminated candy canes, stars and trees wrapped with strings of lights. Until the lights went in, it was a place people avoid at night. □

'Homosexual face': Brazil's Bolsonaro lashes out at press

By DIANE JEANTET

Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro lashed out at journalists on Friday, singling out one as looking like a homosexual, amid news reports of a corruption investigation linked to his son.

A visibly upset Bolsonaro accused the press of bias against him and his son, Sen. Flávio Bolsonaro. Prosecutors in Rio de Janeiro are investigating allegations the younger Bolsonaro hired employees with no duties while he was a state legislator. Another investigation is probing whether those "phantom" workers kicked back part of their salaries to then be laundered through a chocolate



In this Oct. 1, 2019 file photo, President Jair Bolsonaro attends a ceremony to launch an agro program at the Planalto presidential palace in Brasilia, Brazil.

Associated Press

shop he co-owns.

In a video posted to Facebook, the younger Bolson-

aro has delivered a lengthy denial of all wrongdoing.

The drone of accusations

has been a thorn in the side of President Bolsonaro, who was elected on an anti-crime platform to purge the political class of corruption. He has routinely attacked the credibility of mainstream media, particularly targeting the goliath Globo, for unfair coverage. At a routine morning meeting with journalists in the capital, the president complained that media have accused him of being a racist and committing crimes against the environment. Then he told one reporter, "Your face looks an awful lot like a homosexual's, but that's no reason to accuse you of being a homosexual."

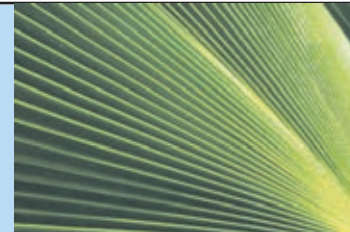
The comment was met with laughs from his aides and

supporters standing nearby.

Asked whether he had proof that a suspicious deposit into his wife's bank account was merely repayment of a debt, he instructed the journalist, "Ask your mother if she gave your dad a receipt," prompting a cheer from his supporters. He then asked whether the reporter had a receipt for his shoes. "No, you don't have it!" he concluded.

Bolsonaro also complained that details of a sealed investigation have consistently leaked to the press. "Is the process under seal or not? Answer! Answer, damn it!," he said, then accused Rio's prosecutors' office of having a "direct line" to Globo's news channel. □

LOCAL



Christmas Lights

ORANJESTAD — Christmas in Aruba would not be complete without a visit to see the Christmas Lights around the island. By just driving around on the main roads you can enjoy a variety of creativity with colorful lights being displayed on various Aruban homes. Also the majority of the roundabouts are decorated.

If you are lucky enough you might hear Christmas carols and "gaitas" at any of these locations but also at the malls and stores. Gaita is a style of Venezuelan folk music from Maracaibo in Zulia State. It is possibly de-

rived from gaits, the Gothic word for goat, the animal whose skin generally is used for the membrane of the furro instrument (kind of tambura with stick). Other instruments used in gaita include maracas, cuatro, charrasca and tambora (Venezuelan drum). Song themes range from humorous and love songs to protest songs. The local gaita bands are composed mostly of a group of ladies who sing with angelic voices while they dance in a choreographic manner. The map shown here will give you an overview of the most popular decorated places around the island.



So hop into your car or call and enjoy the spectacular Christmas scenes. We wish you a wonderful Christmas. ☐

Aruba to Me
Christmas Vibes

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Giant Chanukah Menorahs to light up Aruba

ORANJESTAD — The Jewish eight day holiday of Chanukah begins on Sunday (December 22nd) and Chabad plans to kick off the most celebrated Jewish holiday with a beautiful public Menorah Lighting Ceremony at the Ritz-Carlton Aruba. All are invited to join at the Ritz-Carlton beach-front at 6pm to watch the first candle being lit with the attendance of the honorable Governor Boekhoudt. Delicious latkes and jelly donuts (traditional Chanukah foods) will be served.

Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, begins this year on the evening of Sunday, December 22nd and concludes the evening of Sunday, December 29th. It's



CHANUKAH 2019

with CHABAD of ARUBA

DECEMBER 22-30

<p>DECEMBER 22 SUNDAY</p> <p>Ritz-Carlton Aruba Beach Front ⌚ 6PM</p>	<p>DECEMBER 23 MONDAY</p> <p>Riu Palace - Barry's Bar ⌚ 6PM</p>
<p>DECEMBER 24 TUESDAY</p> <p>Eagle Beach - Opposite La Cabana Beach Resort ⌚ 5:30PM</p>	<p>DECEMBER 25 WEDNESDAY</p> <p>Playa Linda Beach Resort Pool Deck ⌚ 6PM</p>
<p>DECEMBER 26 THURSDAY</p> <p>Marriott Ocean Club Activities' Tent ⌚ 6PM</p>	<p>DECEMBER 27 FRIDAY</p> <p>Shabbat at Chabad ⌚ 6PM Service ⌚ 7PM Dinner Please RSVP www.jewisharuba.com/shabbat</p>
<p>DECEMBER 28 SATURDAY</p> <p>Playa Linda Plaza ⌚ 8PM</p>	<p>DECEMBER 29 SUNDAY</p> <p>Chanukah Live Concert with the Maccabeats Hyatt Regency Parking Lot Palm Beach ⌚ 7PM</p>

ALL WELCOME! FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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a holiday with a universal message of religious freedom, celebrating the victory of a militarily weak Jewish people who defeated the Syrian Greeks who had overrun ancient Israel and sought to impose restrictions on the Jewish way of life and prohibit religious freedom.

Chabad will be taking the joy of Chanukah all around Aruba this coming week with a full schedule of events for all ages. Each night- the public Menorah will be lit at a different location (see below), culminating with a grand Chanukah Maccabeats Concert on the eighth night. "The message of Chanukah is the message of light," said Rabbi Ahron Blasberg, director of Chabad Aruba. "The nature of light is that it is always victorious over darkness. A small amount of light dispels a lot of darkness. This message is ever relevant especially in these days where there is so much darkness in the world and every day brings news of new hate crimes. Let's light our spiritual torches and share our light. Another act of goodness and kindness, another act of light, can make all the difference."

Night #1: December 22nd at 6pm candle lighting ceremony at the Ritz-Carlton Aruba beach front

Night # 2: December 23rd at 6pm candle lighting ceremony at the Riu Palace (Barry's Bar)

Night # 3: December 24th at 5.30pm candle lighting ceremony at Eagle Beach opposite La Cabana Beach Resort

Night #4: December 25th at 6pm candle lighting ceremony at The Playa Linda Beach Resort Pool Deck

Kids Chanukah activities: December 26th 2-3pm at the Marriott Surf Club Den (sign up required www.jewisharuba.com/chanukahkids)

Night #5: December 26th candle lighting ceremony at 6pm at the Marriott Ocean Club Activities Tent

Night # 6: December 27th Shabbat at Chabad (RSVP www.jewisharuba.com/Shabbat)

Night # 7: December 28th at 8pm Havdalla and candle lighting at the Playa Linda Plaza

Night # 8: December 29th at 7pm ~ Chanukah Live Concert with the Maccabeats~ at the Hyatt Regency Parking Lot (VIP tickets www.jewisharuba.com/chanukahvip)

ALL WELCOME!

For more information, contact Rabbi Ahron Blasberg, at Rabbi@JewishAruba.com or visit www.JewishAruba.com.

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SPORTS



Milwaukee Bucks' Khris Middleton fouls Los Angeles Lakers' LeBron James during the first half of an NBA basketball game Thursday, Dec. 19, 2019, in Milwaukee.
Associated Press

Antetokounmpo, Bucks beat Davis-led Lakers 111-104

By KEITH JENKINS
AP Sports Writer

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Giannis Antetokounmpo looked over at LeBron James and Anthony Davis and thought about his past.

"I wasn't supposed to be here," the 6-foot-11 Greek Freak said. Hardly looked that way Thursday night.

Antetokounmpo had 34 points and 11 rebounds, and the Milwaukee Bucks beat James, Davis and the Los Angeles Lakers 111-104 in a showdown of the NBA's top teams.

The reigning MVP had seven assists and a career-best five 3-pointers as Milwaukee improved to 25-4 after ending an 18-game winning streak against Dallas on Monday night.

"I wasn't the No. 1 pick, AD was, LeBron was," Antetokounmpo said.

Continued on Page 21

NFC LEAST



Cowboys can clinch maligned division with win over Eagles

Dallas Cowboys wide receiver Tavon Austin (10) celebrates his touchdown against the Los Angeles Rams with teammate Travis Frederick in front of quarterback Dak Prescott (4) in the first half of an NFL football game in Arlington, Texas, Sunday, Dec. 15, 2019.

Associated Press
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Kriechmayr wins fog-delayed super-G in Gardena after 4 hours

SELVA DI VAL GARDENA, Italy (AP) — Austrian skier Vincent Kriechmayr narrowly edged Norwegian rival Kjetil Jansrud to win a fog-affected World Cup super-G that lasted nearly four hours on Friday.

The shortened race had been interrupted for 45 minutes due to fog hanging over the middle of the Saslong course before Kriechmayr came down as the No. 7 starter and beat early leader Mauro Caviezel.

Kriechmayr then had to wait nearly three hours before the race was declared finished amid near darkness at 3:30 p.m. (1430 GMT) due to more fog. In all, the event lasted 3 hours, 45 minutes before the results were taken with 48 of 64 skiers having raced.

It was worth the wait, though, as the result moved Kriechmayr atop both the overall and super-G standings. In the overall, Kriechmayr moved 48 points ahead of previous leader Alexis Pinturault, who did not enter this race. In the super-G, Kriechmayr moved 12 points ahead of Olympic champion and teammate Matthias Mayer, who finished 11th. Kriechmayr trailed the early leaders at each of the first



Austria's Vincent Kriechmayr competes during an alpine ski, men's World Cup Super G, in Val Gardena, Italy, Friday, Dec. 20, 2019.

two checkpoints but was masterful through the technical Ciaslat section that features a series of small bumps and jumps that rattled many skiers off the racing line.

Jansrud came down later and built a lead of 0.32 seconds over Kriechmayr into the final checkpoint but was carrying so much speed that he had to slam on the brakes to clear one of the final gates and finished 0.05 behind.

Thomas Dessen of Germany, another late starter, finished third, 0.22 behind Kriechmayr.

It was the fifth World Cup victory of Kriechmayr's career, to go with the two medals he won at last season's world championships in Are, Sweden — silver in super-G and bronze in downhill.

It was also Kriechmayr's third podium result this season after finishing third in a super-G in Lake Louise,

Alberta; and second in a downhill in Beaver Creek, Colorado.

"I'm really happy and proud about my skiing today," Kriechmayr said. "This is a legendary course and I really like it."

A Norwegian coach set the course, which resembled more of a downhill than a super-G in certain sections. Still, Jansrud couldn't add to Norway's record total of eight super-G wins in Val Gardena — including a vic-

tory last year by Aksel Lund Svindal, who is now retired.

"That's a very, very good result for me right now," said Jansrud, the 2014 Olympic super-G champion who had struggled this season. "Now I can take it a little easier with the nerves and get ready for tomorrow's downhill and hopefully be fast then, too."

Jansrud led downhill training on Thursday.

It was the sixth podium result of Dessen's career.

Poor conditions forced organizers to lower the start, cutting off about 15 seconds of racing.

Caviezel finished fourth and Dominik Paris was fifth. Steven Nyman, a three-time winner of the Val Gardena downhill, was the top American in 13th.

Nyman was fighting for a podium position until he had to make an acrobatic recovery to maintain control midway down — much like he did toward the end of his downhill training run a day earlier. Italian veteran Christof Innerhofer crashed during his run as a forerunner. A downhill is scheduled for Saturday on the Saslong, then the circuit moves over to nearby Alta Badia for a giant slalom and parallel giant slalom on Sunday and Monday, respectively. □

Associated Press

Adam Scott trails by 2 after 2 rounds at the Australian PGA

GOLD COAST, Australia (AP) — Adam Scott was two strokes off the lead and tied for third place after a second-round

5-under 67 at the Australian PGA championship at Royal Pines on Friday. The leader was China's Yuan Yechun, whose 65 left him at 9-under 135 after 36 holes. He bogeyed two of his final four holes.

Scott, attempting to win his first tournament since a World Golf Championship victory in March 2016, is playing his third week in a row after the Australian Open and last week's Presidents Cup at Royal Melbourne. Australian Anthony Quayle was in second place,



International team player Adam Scott of Australia celebrates a win over the U.S. during their fourball match at the Royal Melbourne Golf Club in the opening rounds of the President's Cup golf tournament in Melbourne, Thursday, Dec. 12, 2019.

Associated Press

a stroke behind, after a 66, followed by Scott and Wade Ormsby, who shot 66.

Cameron Champ had a 71 and was at 3-under, one stroke better than fellow American Stewart

Cink, who shot 70.

Scott's round included a 40-foot eagle putt and two lengthy birdies with one bogey.

"I played safe, rolled a lot of nice putts, a lot went by the edge but I made a couple as well," Scott said. "I had to really dial it in to get it close. It was a patient round and eventually I kind of wore the course down."

Scott said he knew another mediocre round like his 70 on Thursday wouldn't put him among the leaders.

"After the bogey on four I just felt I need to get moving a bit here because 2-under's not going to put me up there far enough,"

Scott said. "It'll be good for me to focus up for two more days. I need more of the same, but feeling like I've got definitely two more days in me."

Cameron Smith, aiming to be the first player in more than 100 years to win three straight Australian PGA titles, followed up his opening 74 with a 65 to leave the Australian at 5-under and four strokes behind.

Smith said the President Cup, where his International team lost 16-14 to the United States, had drained him both physically and mentally. But he said an afternoon nap Thursday and swim at the beach had helped him bounce back. □

NFL This Week: Cowboys, Eagles chase East title at .500 mark

By **DAVE CAMPBELL**
AP Pro Football Writer

Complaints about the NFL's playoff structure have rarely carried more clout than down the stretch of this season, given the glaring weakness of the NFC East. Though there are currently no teams in this quagmire of a quartet with a winning record, yes, either Dallas or Philadelphia will still get to host a first-round game against a wild-card team already guaranteed to have a better record. The difference could be by as many as four games. Neither the Cowboys (7-7) nor the Eagles (7-7) are concerned about the imbalance, of course. They're simply aiming to close the year strong after so many puzzling struggles. They'll play in Philadelphia on Sunday afternoon, one of the most meaningful games on the Week 16 schedule even if this is hardly a matchup of Super Bowl-caliber competitors.

The Cowboys, who started the season 3-0, beat the Los Angeles Rams 44-21 last week for a badly needed spark. The Eagles, who recovered from a 37-10 loss at Dallas on Oct. 20 to improve to 5-4 entering their bye, beat Washington 37-27 last week to keep pace. The Cowboys can clinch the division with a win. The Eagles need two more victories to claim their spot, with their final game at the New York Giants. Dallas wraps up 2019 against the Redskins. Assuming no ties, then, the NFC East will finish with a total of 24 wins. Last season, the only one of the NFL's eight divisions with fewer than 30 victories was the AFC East with 28. Houston, which went 9-7 in 2016, was the last team to win a division with nine wins or fewer.

Denver coach Vic Fangio went so far last week as to informally present to reporters his preferred format, which would eliminate divisions altogether and have each team play every other conference opponent on an annual basis to ensure the top six squads from each side qualify for

the playoffs. That's just one man's outside-the-box idea for enacting change, though. The Cowboys and Eagles are both still fully entitled to the division championship that almost every team states as a goal when training camps convene in the summer.

Here's a closer look at the other games this weekend:
HOUSTON (9-5) at TAMPA BAY (7-7)

The Texans and Bucca-

vision titles in the past five seasons.

BUFFALO (10-4) at NEW ENGLAND (11-3)

Rare is the year for the Patriots under coach Bill Belichick and quarterback Tom Brady when they haven't already wrapped up the AFC East on the weekend before Christmas Day, but they host a Buffalo team that still has a chance to end their peerless streak of 10 straight division crowns.

even need to beat the Rams for that to happen, but it would clearly be the best way to go, with the de facto division title game at Seattle waiting in Week 17. The 49ers, who haven't swept the Rams since 2016, could still fall as far as the No. 6 seed, too. The defending NFC champion Rams, who have been one of the league's biggest let-downs this year, can only return to the playoffs if they

pick positioning. The Jaguars are 10-20 since losing the AFC championship game at New England after the 2017 season.

BALTIMORE (12-2) at CLEVELAND (6-8)

Baltimore can clinch home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs by beating the Browns, with a second straight AFC North title already secured. Lamar Jackson can pad his MVP credentials, already leading the NFL with 33 touchdown passes and owning the single-season quarterback record with 1,103 rushing yards.

The Ravens can also exact some revenge for their 40-25 loss at home on Sept. 29 to Cleveland. The Browns have not done much well at all since that eye-raising performance, though they remain mathematically alive for a wild-card spot.

NEW ORLEANS (11-3) at TENNESSEE (8-6)

With the NFL career record for touchdown passes in hand for now, Drew Brees has the NFC South champion Saints in position to do some damage in January and return to the Super Bowl for the first time in 10 years. They'll need some help to secure a first-round bye, though, and road games at Tennessee and Carolina await. The Saints are one of four 11-3 teams in the NFC, marking this just the second time since the 16-game schedule was initiated in 1978 that four NFC teams were tied for the top record with two or fewer weeks remaining.

The Titans squandered their inside track to the AFC South title, now needing the Buccaneers to beat Houston before they can be concerned about the Week 17 rematch with the Texans. There's a wild-card spot well within reach, though, with Pittsburgh the primary competitor and both teams sporting the same record. Titans quarterback Ryan Tannehill, who has quietly been one of the league's best comeback performers, trails only Brees for the NFL's best passer rating and completion percentage. □



New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady lands on the turf after being sacked by Kansas City Chiefs defensive end Chris Jones in the second half of an NFL football game, Sunday, Dec. 8, 2019, in Foxborough, Mass.

Associated Press

neers kick off a tripleheader on Saturday for the NFL Network, with Houston in position to clinch a second consecutive AFC South title after overtaking the division with a win over second-place Tennessee last week. The Texans have a rematch waiting with the Titans in Week 17, but that won't matter if they beat a Tampa Bay team that is surging too late. Even if the Texans lose, they would wrap up at least a wild-card spot if Pittsburgh loses to the New York Jets.

The Buccaneers have won four straight games, but they'll be absent from the playoffs for a 12th straight year. They'll also likely be missing both of their Pro Bowl wide receivers, Mike Evans and Chris Godwin, with hamstring injuries.

The Texans, if they win, would join New England and Kansas City as the only teams with at least four di-

The Bills haven't had one of those since 1995.

For that to happen, the upstart Bills must not only win at New England but beat the Jets in Week 17 and have the Patriots lose at home to the lowly Dolphins. Both the Bills and Patriots are safely in the playoffs, but that's hardly satisfying for Belichick, Brady and their cohorts. The Patriots, who can also clinch a first-round bye with a win and a loss by the Chiefs at Chicago, would match San Francisco for the most 12-win seasons since the 1970 merger. The 49ers have 13, and the Patriots and Cowboys have 12 each.

LOS ANGELES RAMS (8-6) at SAN FRANCISCO (11-3)

Though they were set back by a 29-22 loss at home to an Atlanta team that's long been eliminated from playoff contention, the 49ers can still seize the top seed in the NFC. They wouldn't

beat San Francisco and Arizona in Week 17 and have Minnesota lose to both Green Bay and Chicago over the final two games.

JACKSONVILLE (5-9) at ATLANTA (5-9)

The 2019 highlight film for the Falcons will start and end with road wins over NFC powers New Orleans and San Francisco, because the rest of the story has been about the continued steady decline for the 2016 NFC champions who were oh, so close to beating the Patriots in the Super Bowl that year. They'll finish with their second straight losing record. Matt Ryan needs 231 passing yards to hit the 4,000-yard mark for a ninth straight time.

This is one of four games out of 11 contests on Sunday afternoon pitting two teams eliminated from the postseason race, playing only for pride, development and, naturally, draft

Seguin scores in OT, Stars beat Lightning 4-3

By The Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Tyler Seguin scored three minutes into overtime, Anton Khudobin stopped 45 shots, and the Dallas Stars beat the Tampa Bay Lightning 4-3 on Thursday night.

After Tampa Bay's Tyler Johnson missed a shot from close range, Alexander Radulov passed to Seguin, who skated in from left wing boards and got the winner from the low slot.

Dallas also got goals from Radulov, Radek Faksa, and Jason Dickinson. Khudobin stopped Yanni Gourde's shot during a 2-on-none break in the third.

Mikhail Sergachev, Alex Killorn and Ondrej Palat scored, and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 16 saves for the Lightning. Nikita Kucherov, the NHL MVP last season, had an assist after being benched for the third period and overtime in Tuesday night's 4-3 win over Ottawa following a costly turnover.

FLYERS 6, SABRES 1

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — James van Riemsdyk scored twice and Philadelphia took advantage of some sloppy defense and a strong power play to beat short-handed Buffalo. The Sabres were without captain Jack Eichel, the NHL's second-leading goal scorer who was a late scratch after participating in pregame workouts with what was called an upper-body injury. The scratch put an end to Eichel's 17-game point scoring streak — the league's longest this season — because the NHL does not allow point streaks to continue because of missed games.

Buffalo deflected three shots past goaltender Carter Hutton to assist the rout. Van Riemsdyk recorded his second two-goal game of the season. Mikhail Vorobyev, Matt Niskanen, Ivan Provorov and Tyler Pitlick were credited with goals for Philadelphia, who put 29 shots on Hutton in the victory. The Flyers were 3 for 5 with the man advantage Thursday.

Flyers goaltender Carter had 16 saves.



Dallas Stars right wing Alexander Radulov (47) watches his goal get past Tampa Bay Lightning goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy (88) during the first period of an NHL hockey game Thursday, Dec. 19, 2019, in Tampa, Fla.

Associated Press

Victor Olofsson added his 15th goal midway through the third period for the Sabres. Hutton finished with 22 saves.

BLUE JACKETS 3, KINGS 2, OT

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Pierre-Luc Dubois scored in overtime, Zach Werenski had a goal and an assist, and Columbus rallied to beat Los Angeles.

Boone Jenner scored with 1:43 remaining to force overtime for the Blue Jackets, who won after trailing in the first period for the second time this season. Dubois got the winner 1:11 into overtime when he took a tape-to-tape pass from Gustav Nyquist on a 2-on-2 rush. Adrian Kempe and Jeff Carter scored for the Kings, who lost in overtime for the second time in four games. Los Angeles was beaten after leading for two periods for the first time this season.

Joonas Korpisalo stopped 23 shots to earn his 15th win of the season. Jack Campbell made 25 saves for the Kings.

ISLANDERS 3, BRUINS 2, SO

BOSTON (AP) — Matthew Barzal scored in regulation and the shootout as New York beat Boston.

In the shootout, Jordan Eberle and Barzal scored for the Islanders. David Pastrnak scored for the Bruins.

Brad Marchand's attempt to extend the shootout was stymied by Islanders goalie Semyon Varlamov.

Varlamov had 27 saves as New York snapped a seven-game losing streak to Boston. The Islanders have won four of five.

Anders Bjork and Torey Krug scored for Boston. The Bruins are winless in four straight at home and seven of eight overall.

New York's Johnny Boychuk scored for the first time in 21 games, tying the score at 1 when beat a screened Tuukka Rask with a shot from the blue line at 3:26 of the second.

SENATORS 5, PREDATORS 4, OT

OTTAWA, Ontario (AP) — Anthony Duclair scored a power-play goal 2:40 into overtime, giving goaltender Marcus Hogberg his first NHL win as Ottawa beat Nashville. Hogberg, an emergency recall for the Senators after Anders Nilsson became ill, stopped 33 shots. Colin White, Vladimir Namestnikov, Artem Anisimov and Brady Tkachuk also scored for the Senators, who recovered after blowing a 4-1 lead.

Craig Smith, Rocco Grimaldi, Ryan Johansen and Roman Josi scored for the Predators. Juuse Saros made 19 saves.

BLACKHAWKS 4, JETS 1

WINNIPEG, Manitoba (AP) — Patrick Kane scored his 19th goal of the season and had three assists in Chicago's victory over Winnipeg.

Robin Lehner made 36 saves, Alex Nylander had a goal and assist and Dominik Kubalik and Erik Gustafsson also scored to help the Blackhawks rebound from a 4-1 home loss to Colorado on Wednesday night.

Tucker Poolman scored for Winnipeg and Connor Hellebuyck made 28 saves.

HURRICANES 3, AVALANCHE 1

DENVER (AP) — Andrei Svechnikov and Jacob Slavin scored 1:17 apart and Carolina rallied past Colorado.

Sebastian Aho also scored, and James Reimer had 27 saves as Carolina extended its points streak to seven games and finished its road trip 4-0-1.

Nathan MacKinnon scored and Philipp Grubauer stopped 37 shots for the Avalanche, who lost despite leading with less than three minutes remaining.

CANADIENS 4, FLAMES 3, OT

CALGARY, Alberta (AP) — Max Domi beat goalie Dave Rittich on an end-to-end overtime rush to give Montreal the win over Calgary. Domi fired a low slap shot from just above the left faceoff circle that eluded

Rittich's glove on the far side at 3:52 of the extra period. Nick Suzuki pulled the Canadiens even at 3 with 9:02 left in regulation, deflecting Nick Cousins' pass over Rittich's head.

Carey Price made 24 saves, and Brendan Gallagher and Joel Armia added goals to help Montreal improve to 4-1 in its last five and 17-12-6 overall.

Matthew Tkachuk and Elias Lindholm each had a goal and an assist for Calgary. Oliver Kylington scored his first of the season, and Johnny Gaudreau had two assists. Rittich stopped 39 shots.

WILD 8, COYOTES 5

GLENDALE, Ariz. (AP) — Marcus Foligno, Eric Staal and Mats Zuccarello each had a goal and two assists and Minnesota edged Arizona in a high-scoring game. The Wild snapped a three-game losing streak, scoring eight goals on 33 shots, including an empty-net goal in the final seconds. Arizona lost for the fourth time in five home games and the setback was compounded by an injury to No. 1 goaltender Darcy Kuemper, who had to be helped off the ice with 3:08 remaining in the game after spreading to make a save on a shot by Ryan Hartman. Hartman and Brad Hunt each had a goal and assist. Ryan Suter, Ryan Donato and Luke Kunin also scored for Minnesota. Devan Dubnyk had 35 saves in his first game since Nov. 16.

Jakob Chychrun scored two goals, and Oliver Ekman-Larsson, Clayton Keller and Phil Kessel also scored for the Coyotes. Newly acquired forward Taylor Hall, in his home debut, got the primary assist on Kessel's first-period goal. Nick Schmaltz had three assists, raising his team-high point total to 27, and Alex Goligoski added two assists for the Coyotes.

CANUCKS 5, GOLDEN KNIGHTS 4, OT

VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — Chris Tanev scored at 1:30 of overtime and Vancouver edged Vegas. □

NBA sends teams proposal for 78-game season, other changes

By TIM REYNOLDS
AP Basketball Writer

MIAMI (AP) — The NBA has sent a proposal to teams calling for a 78-game regular season, along with an in-season tournament for all teams and a reseeding of the playoffs when the field is cut to the final four clubs. A copy of the proposal was obtained by The Associated Press on Friday. The plan laid out for teams calls for a play-in tournament to decide the seventh and eighth seeds in both conferences — the top 10 finishers in both the East and West would therefore have a chance at the playoffs — as well as a \$1 million per player prize for the in-season tournament.

The league would make the changes for the 2021-22 season on a trial basis, with an option to continue the next season. The league's board of governors is expected to discuss and likely decide whether to go forward or not with the plan in April. The notion of adding a in-season tournament has been something Commissioner Adam Silver has talked about since at least 2016, drawing the parallel to how such events are customary in European soccer.

"It would need to be negotiated with the Players Association," Silver said earlier this year. "I've had very general discussions with (union executive director) Michele Roberts about the notion that these are the kinds of things we're looking at. I think she, of course, is supportive of looking at any ideas we have to build the business over time." ESPN and The Athletic first reported on the contents of the proposal.

The NBA told teams that a study it commissioned through a third-party company earlier this year showed that 60% of NBA fans want a shorter regular season, that 68% of fans said they are interested in an in-season tournament and 75% were interested in a play-in tournament to decide the playoff field.

The same study, the NBA said, found fans liked the idea of reseeding the final four playoff teams — even though that would open the door to the potential of the NBA Finals going on between two teams from the same conference.

The NBA told teams that "fans feel it would make the final two rounds more desirable to watch."

A breakdown of the



In this Oct. 8, 2019, file photo, NBA Commissioner Adam Silver speaks at a news conference before an NBA preseason basketball game between the Houston Rockets and the Toronto Raptors in Saitama, Japan.

Associated Press

changes:

IN-SEASON TOURNAMENT

The proposal calls for teams to play eight divisional games in the group stage of the event, which would begin Nov. 24, 2021 and continue through Dec. 11. (The NBA said the dates are tentative.) The group stage games — four home, four away — would count toward a team's regular-season total.

The six division winners and two wild cards would qualify for the quarterfinals on Dec. 13 and 14, 2021. Semifinals would be played as a doubleheader on Dec. 16 and the title game would be played two days later — with the semis and finals

at a neutral site like Las Vegas. Players on the winning team would split \$15 million; the winning coaching staff would split \$1.5 million. The NBA said that there is the potential for "additional prizing for players on the remaining final four teams" and that other incentives for teams and fans were "to be determined."

PLAY-IN TOURNAMENT

The regular season would end on a Saturday, one week before the start of the playoffs — as opposed to ending on Wednesday, as has been the case for years.

The top six teams in each conference would be in the playoffs.

The teams in seventh through 10th place in the regular-season standings would play off as follows: The seventh- and eighth-place teams would play with the winner clinching the No. 7 playoff seed. The teams holding the ninth- and 10th-place regular season spots would also play, and the winner of that game would play the loser of the 7-8 game to determine the No. 8 playoff seed.

From there, the first two rounds would be played as usual. Once the playoff field is down to four teams, those clubs would be reseeded based on regular-season record. □

Antetokounmpo

Continued from Page 17

"I wasn't supposed to be here. I wasn't supposed to go up against these two beasts. So I'm just happy that I'm here and happy that I'm going through the process and I always want to be better, do better for my team and that's what gives me joy."

James had 21 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists for his seventh triple-double of the season, and Davis had 36 points and 10 rebounds. "You tip your hat off to him and we move forward," Davis said of Antetokounmpo.

The Lakers dropped their second straight game and

fell to 24-5 largely because their bench was outscored 34-4 by the Bucks' reserves. George Hill had 21 points off the bench for Milwaukee.

The last time two teams that were 20 games over .500 played each other before Jan. 1 was 1980. The Boston Celtics (28-8) played the Suns (32-8) in Phoenix. Boston won 116-97.

"No matter what team we play," Hill said, "we come in with the same mentality to get better that night on both ends of the floor, and it just happened to be the Lakers tonight."

Milwaukee led by six after the first quarter then opened the second with a

20-7 run. Davis and James combined to shoot 6 for 20 in the first half, and the Lakers had 10 turnovers. The Bucks led 65-46 at the break.

Los Angeles outscored Milwaukee 68-46 in the second half to close the gap. The Lakers now head home after ending a five-game trip.

"We continue to build chemistry, we continue to build camaraderie," James said. "Pretty much every time anyone does anything, we pretty much do it together on the road. Just kind of have that bunker mentality, that brotherhood when we hit the road."

The Bucks improved to 3-0 against the two teams from Los Angeles, including a dominant 119-91 win over the Clippers at home on Dec. 6.

SPURS 118, NETS 105

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Patty Mills had 27 points and San Antonio overcame a career-high 41 points from Spencer Dinwiddie to beat Brooklyn.

Mills had 21 points in the second half, shooting 5 for 8 on 3-pointers as the Spurs rallied from a 14-point deficit to beat the Nets for the 17th straight home game. LaMarcus Aldridge added 20 points and 10 rebounds for San Antonio.

Brooklyn's Kyrie Irving

missed his 17th straight game with a right shoulder impingement. Dinwiddie tried to cover by shooting 14 of 29 from the field, eclipsing his career high by two points.

JAZZ 111, HAWKS 106

ATLANTA (AP) — Donovan Mitchell scored two of his 30 points on a tricky baseline drive that put Utah ahead for good.

Mitchell faked a pass from under the basket before slamming the breaks and connecting from beneath the backboard with 3:47 left.

That made it 101-99, and he cemented the win with two free throws with 13 seconds left. □

Average MLB salary drops for 2nd straight year

By **RONALD BLUM**
AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The average salary in the major leagues has dropped in consecutive years for the first time since the players' association started keeping records more than a half-century ago.

The 988 players on Aug. 31 rosters and injured lists averaged \$4,051,490, the union said Friday, down 1.1% from \$4,095,686 last year. The average peaked at \$4,097,122 in 2017.

This was just the fifth decline since records started in 1967, when the average was \$19,000. There also were drops in 1987, when clubs were found guilty of collusion; in 1995, after the end of a 7 1/2-month strike; and in 2004. This year's drop followed two slow free-agent markets and new contracts with large signing bonuses for Mike Trout, Alex Bregman, Manny Machado and A.J. Pollock. Those four players received \$62 million in signing bonuses during 2019 that are prorated over the length of each contract in the calculation of the average. If the entire amounts had been counted for 2019, the average would have been about \$54,000 higher — more



In this Aug. 17, 2019, file photo, Los Angeles Angels' Mike Trout drives in two runs with a single against the Chicago White Sox during the seventh inning of a baseball game in Anaheim, Calif.
Associated Press

than the \$44,196 drop. Those stars all receive huge increases for 2020, and Gerrit Cole, Stephen Strasburg and Anthony Rendon agreed to \$200 million-plus contracts last week. There also were 20 additional players on injured lists this Aug. 31, causing more players to be brought up from the minor leagues who made at or close to the \$555,000 minimum. Several players with large salaries were released and then re-signed by other teams for the minimum, which is then used for the average, a group that included Homer Bailey, Matt Harvey and Matt Kemp. In

addition, Troy Tulowitzki and David Wright retired due to injuries, which meant their salaries were not included in the average.

Major League Baseball computed its average at \$3,894,220, down 2.8% from \$4,007,987 last year and \$3,955,920 in 2017.

The union includes option buyouts in its average calculation, while MLB does not. Figures are based on the last day before active rosters expanded from 25 to 40 for the final time. Starting in 2020, there will be a 26-player limit from opening day through Aug. 31 and then 28 for the rest of the season. □



In this Oct. 7, 2019, file photo, Los Angeles Dodgers starting pitcher Rich Hill throws against the Washington Nationals during the first inning in Game 4 of a baseball National League Division Series in Washington.
Associated Press

Dodgers lefty Rich Hill is Tony Conigliaro Award winner

BOSTON (AP) — Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Rich Hill has won the Tony Conigliaro Award.

The honor goes to a major leaguer "who has overcome adversity through the attributes of spirit, determination and courage that were the trademarks of Tony C."

Hill, 39, worked his way back three times from an arm and two knee injuries to finish the season with the Dodgers, starting Game 4 of the NLDS against the Washington Nationals.

Conigliaro was a Boston-area native who was the youngest player to lead a

league in homers, hitting 32 in 1965, his second full season.

He was hit in the face by a pitch on Aug. 18, 1967, fracturing his cheekbone, dislocating his jaw and damaging the retina in his left eye.

He returned after missing all of 1968 to play two more seasons, but retired due to declining vision in 1971.

He died in 1982 at the age of 45. The award in his name has been given out by Major League Baseball since 1990. It will be presented on Jan. 16 at the 81st annual Boston Baseball Writers' dinner. □

White Sox boost rotation, agree to \$5M deal with Gonzalez

By **ANDREW SELIGMAN**
AP Sports Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — The White Sox boosted their starting rotation, finalizing a \$5 million, one-year contract with two-time All-Star Gio González that includes a 2021 club option.

The deal announced Friday calls for a \$4.5 million salary in 2020 and gives the White Sox a \$7 million option for 2021 with a \$500,000 buyout. He can earn an additional \$1 million in performance bonuses in 2020 based on starts: \$250,000 each for 15, 20, 25 and 30. The 34-year-old left-hander finally will get a chance to pitch for the team that took him with the No. 38 over-

all pick in the 2004 amateur draft. Chicago dealt González to Philadelphia following the 2005 season as part of the trade that sent Aaron Rowand to the Phillies for Jim Thome, then reacquired González a year later along with Gavin Floyd for Freddy García. The White Sox traded González to Oakland for Nick Swisher in January 2008.

González debuted with the Athletics in 2008 and is 130-99 with a 3.68 ERA over 12 years with Oakland (2008-11), Washington (2012-18) and Milwaukee (2018-19). He was an All-Star in 2011 and 2012, when he won a career-high 21 games and had a 2.89 ERA.



In this Sept. 28, 2019, file photo, Milwaukee Brewers starting pitcher Gio Gonzalez works against the Colorado Rockies in the first inning of a baseball game in Denver.
Associated Press

González was 3-2 with a 3.50 ERA in 17 starts and 19 appearances last season. "We view Gio as an important addition to our pitch-

ing staff," general manager Rick Hahn said in a statement. "He brings an impressive resume to our club as a veteran left-hander who

has enjoyed success and should have a positive impact on our younger pitchers in terms of competing, battling and helping us win games at the major league level." Chicago went 72-89 in its seventh straight losing season and missed the playoffs for the 13th time in 14 years since its 2005 World Series title. But with young players establishing themselves in the majors and promising prospects in the minors, the White Sox expect to contend for a post-season spot. Right-hander Lucas Giolito went from the highest ERA among qualifiers in 2018 to his first All-Star season, going 14-9 with a 3.41 ERA in 29 starts. □

Junior Johnson, "The Last American Hero," dies at 88

JENNA FRYER
AP Auto Racing Writer

Robert Glenn "Junior" Johnson, the moonshine runner turned NASCAR driver described as "The Last American Hero" by author Tom Wolfe in a 1965 article for Esquire, died Friday. He was 88.

NASCAR announced the death of Johnson, the winner of 50 races as a driver and 132 as an owner. He was a member of the inaugural class inducted into the NASCAR Hall of Fame in 2010.

"From his early days running moonshine through the end of his life, Junior wholly embodied the NASCAR spirit," NASCAR Chairman Jim France said in a statement. "He was an inaugural NASCAR Hall of Famer, a nod to an extraordinary career as both a driver and team owner. Between his on-track accomplishments and his introduction of (sponsor) Winston to the sport, few have contributed to the success of NASCAR as Junior has."

"The entire NASCAR family is saddened by the loss of a true giant of our sport, and we offer our deepest condolences to Junior's family and friends during this difficult time."

From North Wilkesboro, North Carolina, Johnson was named one of NASCAR's greatest drivers in

1998 after a 14-year career that ended in 1966 and included a win in the 1960 Daytona 500. He honed his driving skills running moonshine through the North Carolina hills, a crime for which he received a federal conviction in 1956 and a full presidential pardon in 1986 from President Ronald Reagan.

His was first immortalized by Wolfe in 1965 and later in a 1973 movie adaptation starring Jeff Bridges.

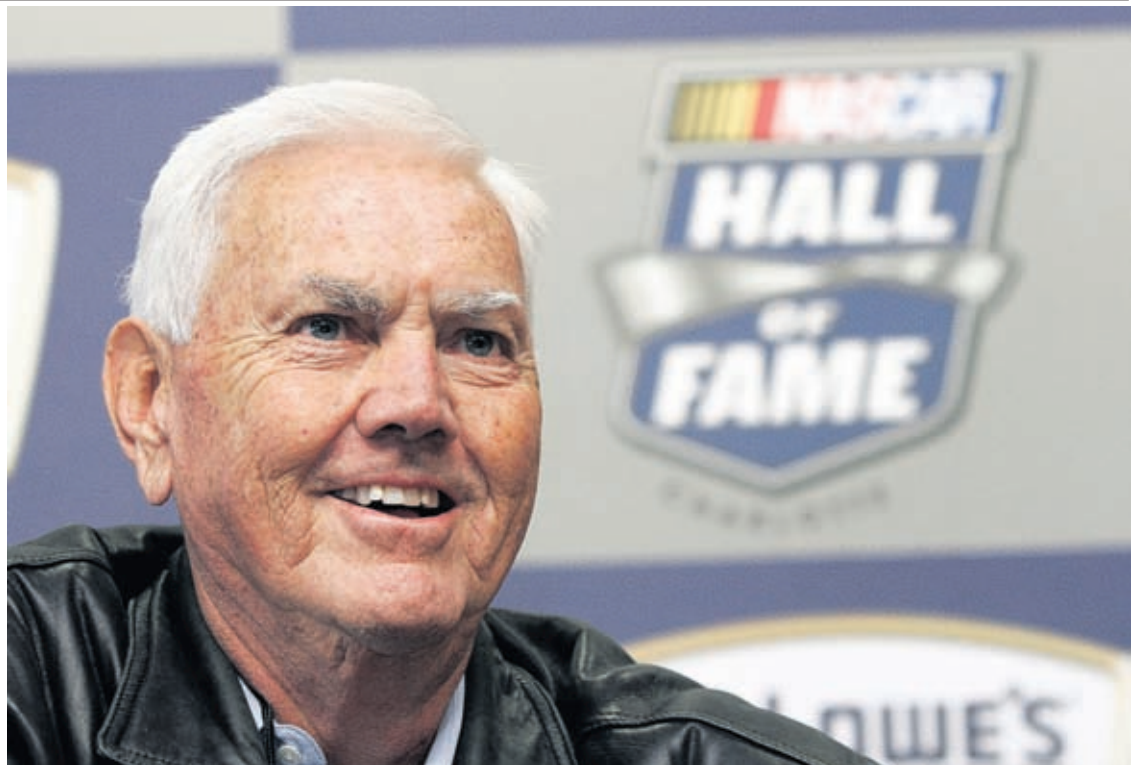
As a car owner for drivers that included Darrell Waltrip, Cale Yarborough, Bill Elliott and Terry Labonte, Johnson claimed six Cup championships. His last race win as an owner was the 1994 Southern 500 with Elliott.

Waltrip said he grew up only dreaming of one day meeting Johnson, but surpassed that by getting to drive for his hero.

"He became my boss and made me a champion, I loved that man, God Bless Jr and his family. You were the greatest!" Waltrip said on Twitter.

Johnson also is credited with bringing the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company to NASCAR, which then led to Winston sponsoring its premier series from 1971-2003.

"The Last American Hero is gone and so leaves a huge dent in NASCAR racing. Junior Johnson was



In this Oct. 16, 2009, file photo, former NASCAR driver and owner Junior Johnson smiles as he speaks to media about being named to the NASCAR Hall of Fame during a news conference at Lowe's Motor Speedway in Concord, N.C.

Associated Press

one of American sports' great characters and one of the best racer and car owners ever. His mountain man drawl and tricks were legendary," former race promoter Humpy Wheeler said. "He'll go down as one of racing's great ticket sellers."

Johnson is credited with discovering drafting — using the slipstream of the car in front of you on the track to keep up or slingshot past. Using that maneuver, he won the 1960 Daytona 500, outrunning several cars that were about 10 mph faster.

As a young man, Johnson built a reputation as a moonshiner who could outrun the law on the mountain roads like no one else. He's credited with inventing the Bootleg Turn, a maneu-

ver that spins the car into a quick 180-degree turn and sends it speeding off in the opposite direction.

Johnson began driving at age 8, long before he had a license.

"I didn't need one anyway," he often said with a laugh. "They weren't going to catch me."

At 24, Johnson turned that talent to racing and became a superstar in NASCAR in the 1950s and 1960s. He walked away from the sport in 1996 to concentrate on his other businesses, including a line of fried pork skins and country ham. "I had done just about everything in racing that I wanted to do," Johnson said in an interview with The Associated Press before driving the pace car for the start of the 2008 Daytona

500, the 50th running of that event. "I do miss being in the garage sometimes, but I just wasn't excited about going racing anymore."

Johnson was never caught on the roads during his moonshining days, but he was arrested by federal authorities in 1956 when he was caught working at his father's still. He was sentenced to 20 months but was released after 11 months in federal prison in Chillicothe, Ohio.

Although a lifelong Democrat, Johnson was pardoned by Reagan. In his later years, Johnson often said that the pardon in December 1986 was "the greatest thing in my life."

Johnson is survived by wife Lisa, daughter Meredith and son Robert Glenn Johnson III. □

Doping on the rise, but WADA lacks resources to investigate



President-Elect of World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) Witold Banka, left, and President of World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) Craig Reedie, right, speak during a press conference after the WADA's extraordinary Executive Committee (ExCo) on the Russian doping data manipulation, in Lausanne, Switzerland, Monday, Dec. 9, 2019.

Associated Press

MONTREAL (AP) — The World Anti-Doping Agency said Thursday more athletes are being caught cheating but it often lacks the resources to investigate.

WADA published statistics showing that 1,804 doping rule violations were recorded in 2017 — the most recent year for which statistics are available — with a 13.1% rise on the year before.

Italian athletes racked up the most violations with 171, followed by competitors from France and the

United States. Russia, which on Thursday said it plans to appeal wide-ranging sanctions imposed by WADA, placed fifth.

While the number of offenses is on the rise, the total number is middling in historical terms, ranking below 2013, 2014 and 2015. Bodybuilding was found to be the dirtiest sport with 266 violations, followed by track and field and cycling. Drug tests aren't the only tool at WADA's disposal. Investigations of athletes and coaches are increas-

ingly important, with 345 violations found in 2017, the highest number on record and a 28% rise compared to the year before.

However, WADA's own investigations unit is struggling to cope with an "acute" lack of resources, according to an audit published Thursday.

The audit said the quality of work was "exceptional" but investigating a vast archive of Russian doping data — which WADA later found had been doctored — put strain on the unit. □

Facebook to tackle efforts to interfere with 2020 US census

By BARBARA ORTUTAY and MAE ANDERSON

AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) —

Facebook plans to clamp down on attempts to use its services to interfere with the 2020 U.S. census, including the posting of misleading information about when and how to participate, who can participate and what happens when people do.

Facebook and other social media companies have been trying to tackle misinformation on their services, especially ahead of next year's U.S. presidential elections. They already have similar policies around voter suppression, banning misleading information about when and where to vote, for instance.

Facebook said Thursday it will prohibit advertisements that portray taking part in the census as "useless or meaningless" or that encourage people not to participate. The company also said it will try to identify and remove misleading census posts before people see them. But it will also remove any posts it misses after the fact, using both technology and humans to spot violations. The company said it will begin enforcing the census policy in January. The census, which happens



In this Aug. 13, 2019, file photo a worker gets ready to pass out instructions in how fill out the 2020 census during a town hall meeting in Lithonia, Ga.

every 10 years, is crucial to determining how many representatives a state gets in Congress and which states and cities get billions of dollars in federal funding for roads, health care, low-income programs and other projects. The results of the 2020 census also will be used to redraw electoral maps.

Civil rights leaders worry that misinformation that discourages immigrants and minorities from participating in the census or voting could lead to those populations being underrepresented in key government decisions for years. Misin-

formation could include warnings of deportation to discourage Latinos from participating, even though federal law prohibits the Census Bureau from sharing census data, including with law enforcement and immigration officials.

Rashad Robinson, president of civil rights group Color of Change, which has pushed Facebook to combat racism and misinformation, called Facebook's new policy "welcome progress." But Robinson said the policy "is only as good as its enforcement and transparency, which, to be clear, is an area that Facebook has

failed in the past."

False and inaccurate information is already circulating online about the census. For example, posts in neighborhood chat groups warned that robbers were scamming their way into people's homes by asking to check residents' identification for the census. That was a hoax, but it left Census Bureau officials scrambling to get the posts removed from Facebook.

Facebook sometimes plays down misleading content rather than banning it outright, as it did with a faked video of Nancy Pelosi that went viral earlier this year.

It can also "downrank" false or misleading posts — including videos — so that fewer people will see them. Such material can also be paired with fact checks produced by outside organizations, including The Associated Press.

But Facebook is defining misleading census posts as a violation of its community standards and thus subject to removal.

Google is also trying to prevent misinformation about the census from spreading. It set up a team to focus on preventing hoaxes and misleading information. It also expanded a YouTube policy to make it clear that misinformation about the census is prohibited on the site and will be taken down. Facebook has long tried to steer clear of having to police its content, claiming it is a platform, not a publisher. But after revelations that that Russians bankrolled thousands of fake political ads during the 2016 elections, Facebook and other social networks faced intense pressure to ensure that doesn't happen again. It tightened political ad requirements including verifying political ad buyers and archiving all political ads for the public. But many have found ways to slip through the cracks of the system. □



In this Monday, Nov. 18, 2019 file photo, the logo of Google is displayed on a carpet at the entrance hall of Google France in Paris.

Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — France's competition authority fined Google 150 million euros (\$166 million) on Friday for "abusing its dominant position" in the online ad market.

The agency said the U.S. tech company mistreated

buyers of ads based on keywords. Methods used by its Google Ads platform are "opaque and difficult to understand" and the company applies them in an "unequal and arbitrary way," it said.

It also ordered Google to

France fines Google \$166 million for abusing ad dominance

clarify the rules for Google Ads and its procedures for freezing accounts, to avoid "brutal and unjustified" suspensions.

It's the latest in a string of European fines against Google, which faces very little competition for search engine business across the continent. The company has been hit in recent years with multibillion-dollar fines imposed by European Union authorities for unrelated antitrust cases and is also facing increasing regulator pressure on other fronts in Europe and the U.S. Google said in a statement

that it would appeal, and that its advertising policies are designed to protect consumers "from exploitative and abusive ads."

The case originated from a complaint that online consulting company Gibmedia filed after Google suspended its ad account in 2015. During and after their protracted dispute, Google published similar ads to those run by Gibmedia, according to the ruling, which also cites other examples of companies Google suspended without justification.

While it says Google's ar-

gument that it's protecting consumers is "perfectly legitimate," its rules are applied incoherently, with some companies' ads allowed and others that sell similar services suspended, the authority said.

It accused the company of "at best negligence, at worst opportunism" by initially offering services to advertisers that it considers dubious and later suspends, just to grow profits.

The ruling details multiple questions about Google's ad algorithms that the competition authority says have gone unanswered. □

Stocks climb as S&P 500 closes in on 10th winning week in 11

By **STAN CHOE**

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stock indexes pushed higher again on Friday, and the S&P 500 was on track to close out its 10th winning week in the last 11.

Trading could be lumpy Friday, with contracts set to expire for futures and options on indexes and stocks in what's known as a "quadruple witching day." But momentum for stocks has been clearly upward for months, and the market is heading into what's historically been a seasonally good period.

Rising optimism around a "Phase 1" trade deal announced a week ago between the United States and China has helped push stock indexes to records. Fears about a possible recession have also faded since the summer after the Federal Reserve cut interest rates three times, and the central bank appears set to keep them low for a long time.

More data arrived on Friday showing U.S. households continue to spend amid a healthy job market. That is making up for hesitance by businesses to spend, and it's helping to keep the economy growing at a moderate pace.

The S&P 500 is on pace for its best week in more than



In this Dec. 13, 2019, file photo trader John Panin works on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange.

Associated Press

three months. Treasury yields edged higher, while crude oil and gold prices dipped.

KEEPING SCORE: The S&P 500 was up 0.5% as of 11 a.m. Eastern time, and the gains were broad. Roughly two stocks rose for every one that fell on the New York Stock Exchange.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 98 points, or 0.3%, to 27,475, and the Nasdaq composite added 0.3%.

ECONOMIC SIGNS: Spending by U.S. households has

been the main pillar for the economy recently, even as CEOs turned cautious amid all the uncertainty created by President Donald Trump's trade wars. Consumer spending rose 0.4% last month from October, the strongest growth in four months, according to the latest data from the Commerce Department. The increase in spending came as incomes rose 0.5% from a month earlier. A separate report confirmed the economy grew at a moderate annual rate of 2.1% in

the third quarter. Much of the growth from that July-through-September quarter came from stronger consumer spending.

SANTA CALLING: Stocks have traditionally climbed in the last five days of each calendar year, plus the first two of the new year. It's happened often enough that traders call it the "Santa rally", and it's brought an average gain of 1.3% for the S&P 500 since 1969, according to the Stock Trader's Almanac.

Over the last 50 years,

stocks have climbed in the seven-day stretch roughly three quarters of the time.

MARKETS ABROAD: European stocks were mostly higher. France's CAC 40 index rose 0.7% and Germany's DAX climbed 0.7%. The FTSE 100 in London was virtually flat. Japan's Nikkei 225 slipped 0.2%. South Korea's Kospi and Hong Kong's Hang Seng both rose 0.3%.
YIELDS: The 10-year Treasury yield rose to 1.92% from 1.91% late Thursday. The two-year yield climbed to 1.61% from 1.60%, and the 30-year yield rose to 2.35% from 2.34%.

GOOD VOYAGE: Carnival jumped 8.5% for the biggest gain in the S&P 500 after it reported stronger earnings for the latest quarter than analysts expected. The cruise ship operator also gave a profit forecast for the upcoming quarter that topped analysts' forecasts.

CLUNKER: CarMax dropped 5.2% for one of the largest losses in the S&P 500 after it reported weaker earnings for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

COMMODITIES: Benchmark U.S. crude oil slipped 84 cents to \$60.34 per barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, fell 46 cents to \$66.08 per barrel. Gold dipped 40 cents to \$1,484.00 per ounce. □

Nike's sales get boost from direct-to-consumer strategy

By **ALEXANDRA OLSON**

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Nike's quarterly results again beat Wall Street expectations, as its online sales grew and customers shrugged off a series of corporate scandals.

The company's revenues grew to \$10.33 billion in the second quarter ending Nov. 30, up 10% from the same period last year. Analysts had been expecting \$10.1 billion in revenue, according to Zacks Investment Research.

Nike's North America sales, however, disappointed slightly at \$3.98 billion, up 5% from \$3.78 billion during



In this Nov. 29, 2019, file photo Nike clothes are displayed at a Kohl's store in Colma, Calif.

Associated Press

the same period last year. Analyst had anticipated sales closer to \$4 billion, according to FactSet.

Its net income rose 32% to \$1.12 billion. Strong sales, a lower tax rate and a focus on selling more shoes at full

price helped offset cost increases related to tariffs. Earnings per share rose to 70 cents, beating expectations of 58 cents per share, according to Zacks. It was Nike's first earnings reporting since announcing that CEO Mark Parker will step down early next year. He will be replaced by board member John Donahoe, who formerly ran e-commerce company eBay and was tapped to push forward Nike's digital transformation.

The Beaverton, Oregon-based company has focused on building up its direct-to-consumer business through its own website,

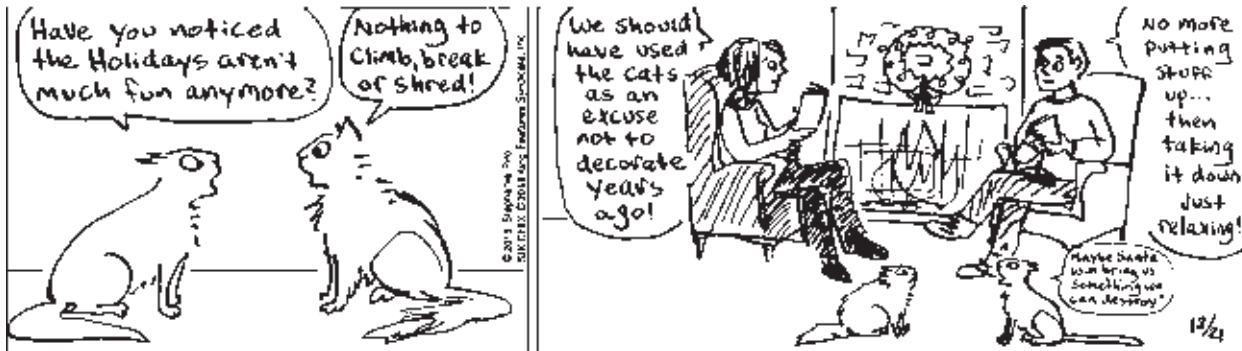
app and stores. The company launched a subscription service for children's shoes last summer. Last month, it announced it will stop selling its sneakers and athletic gear directly to Amazon, ending a two-year-old pilot program with the world's largest online retailer. Selling sneakers directly to its customers gives Nike information on its shoppers that can help it design shoes in colors or sizes it knows they want.

Nike said its operating expenses rose 9% to \$2.44 billion as the company invested in its NIKE Direct business and global operations. □

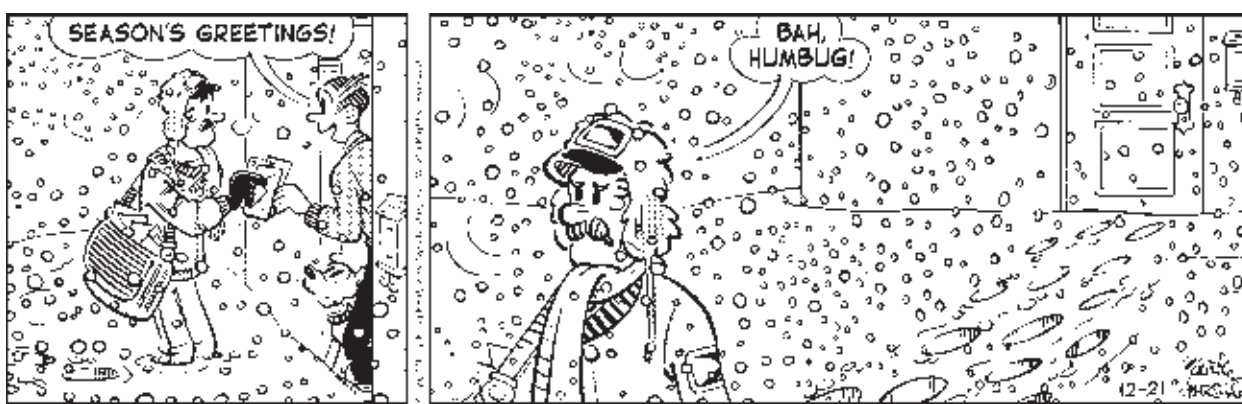
Mutts



6 Chix



Blondie



Mother Goose & Grimm



Baby Blues



Zits



Conceptis Sudoku

		2			5			
	1			3			4	
6		5	7				3	4
	4						4	6
							2	
3	8							
	7	6			2	9		5
		9		4	5		1	

Difficulty Level ★★★★★

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Sunday.

Yesterday's puzzle answer

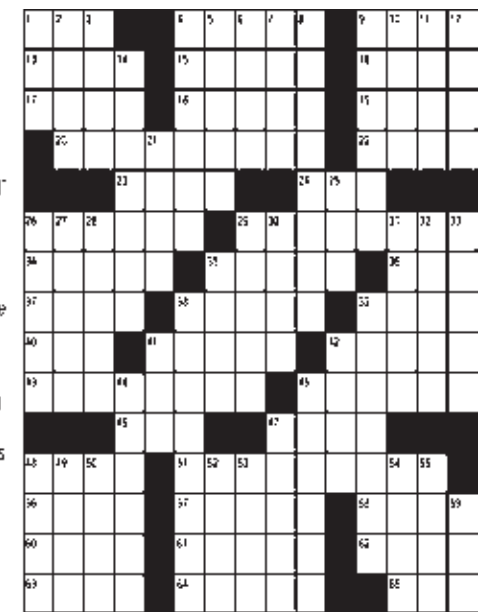
1	6	5	8	9	2	3	4	7
8	3	4	7	5	1	6	9	2
9	7	2	4	3	6	8	1	5
3	5	7	9	2	8	4	6	1
4	9	6	1	7	5	2	8	3
2	8	1	3	6	4	7	5	9
6	1	9	2	8	7	5	3	4
5	2	3	6	4	9	1	7	8
7	4	8	5	1	3	9	2	6

ACROSS

- 1 Recede
- 4 Poe or Bergen
- 7 Take a nap
- 13 Egg on
- 15 Voluntary work
- 16 Sore
- 17 "with the Wind"
- 18 Amphitheater
- 19 Poker token
- 20 Locals
- 22 Make sharper
- 23 Decorated a cake
- 24 Grand Opry
- 26 Fiery particles emitted
- 29 U.S. state capital
- 34 Access Kiosk
- 35 Headfirst plunges
- 36 Scrimmish court divider
- 37 "back relaxed"
- 38 Rescued
- 39 Italian car
- 40 Lacrosse
- 41 More rational
- 42 Adjustable loop
- 43 Spies
- 45 "or later"
- 46 Bread for a Reuben
- 47 Tight as a rope
- 48 Clag or moccasin
- 51 Overexerting
- 56 Night light
- 57 Grieve
- 58 Zero
- 60 Greek liqueur
- 61 Volcanic head
- 62 Equine
- 63 Increased
- 64 Homes in trees
- 65 Animal enclosure

DOWN

- 1 Last one in a rotten
- 2 Crude soap
- 3 Cause of distress
- 4 Steers clear of
- 5 Challenged
- 6 Narrow valley
- 7 Dad's sister
- 8 Use of logic
- 9 Leah's sister
- 10 Canyon sound
- 11 Leg part below the knee
- 12 Variety, sort
- 14 Wanted
- 21 Unpleasant
- 25 Angles
- 26 Sodium chloride minerals
- 27 Make brads
- 28 Wonderland visitor
- 29 Allergic skin reaction
- 30 Take... assume control
- 31 Workers' group
- 32 Rent long-term
- 33 Complete total
- 35 Great tall dog
- 38 Death of a Pulitzer-winning play
- 39 Lost one's slipped
- 41 Undercover agent
- 42 Person place or thing
- 44 Prior to today
- 45 New Orleans team
- 47 Fortune-teller's deck
- 48 Air pollution
- 49 Hand clock feature
- 50 Leak out
- 52 "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?"
- 53 Messages
- 54 Negative replies
- 55 Smelly
- 59 Suffix for cream or rock



Created by Jacqueline E. Matthews

12/21/19

Friday's Puzzle Solved

JAY	OBAMA	ITCH
CARE	POLAR	SHOE
PITS	EXPRESSION	
ALI	DRESS	PUNKS
FLEAS	GEE	
ALIENS	FEASTS	
DECAY	GREEN	RAP
AVOID	SLEEK	PILL
MEASLES	SLAPS	PLUTO
RELATED	CLUMSY	
VOW	CLAMP	
OTHER	SPRAY	HUG
PHARMACIES	SAFE	
EARS	MATES	KNOT
NIKE	ITALY	ITS

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12/21/19

Plan to save sea turtles from shrimp boats scaled way back

By JANET McCONNAUGHEY
Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A plan to make more shrimp-ers include sea turtle escape hatches in their nets has been vastly scaled back, federal regulators announced Thursday, potentially contributing to the deaths of more than 1,000 of the animals each year. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced a rule that would apply to fewer than 1,100 inshore shrimp boats in the Gulf of Mexico and along the southeast Atlantic coast. About 5,800 boats would have been affected by a rule proposed in 2016.

"The new ... requirements are designed specifically to help exclude small sea turtles that frequently occur in shallow, coastal waters where skimmer trawls operate," the agency said in a news release.

Instead of requiring the metal grates in three kinds of inshore nets, they'll be required only in the most numerous, called skimmer trawls. And only boats at least 40 feet (12.2 meters) long will need the grids called turtle excluder devices, or TEDs.

The new rule will take effect April 1, 2021, along the coast from Texas to North North Carolina, and will save as many as 1,160 sea



This June 16, 2016, file photo shows a Kemp's ridley sea turtle hatchling crawling across the beach at Padre Island National Seashore during the 4th public sea turtle hatching release.

Associated Press

turtles a year, NOAA said. That's more than 1,300 fewer than the estimate for the 2016 proposal.

"NOAA's new excluder rule is a dangerous departure from the path it had been on toward saving sea turtles from nets," said Jaclyn Lopez, Florida director with the Center for Biological Diversity.

She said the group will investigate why NOAA "abruptly and without notice" made such a big change to its earlier proposal before deciding whether to challenge the new rule in court. "We're scratching our heads on why this change happened," said Gib Brogan, fishery campaign manager for Oceana, which sued to get the devices into inshore shrimp nets in NOAA's

Southeast Region.

Brogan said the requirements are a step in the right direction, but fall short. Like Lopez, he said his group will study the matter before deciding whether legal action is needed.

The devices have been required for decades on large offshore shrimp boats, but shrimpers have said they could be difficult to operate safely on smaller boats that work in inshore waters.

Turtle excluder devices have metal bars set 4 inches (10 centimeters) apart on a vertical slant to deflect anything bigger to an opening at the top of the net. To protect smaller turtles, skimmer net TEDs will have 3-inch (7.6-centimeter) openings, NOAA said. □

TIME SHARE FOR SALE

Golf Studio week 50 2/12/20

25 wks left Unit 2314 \$2800 and Studio Rm 128

Divi Dutch Village \$1995 or BO

Divi Village wks 17 Studio 4/25

24 weeks left \$1800 BO

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508 651 0016

E-mail: rmwjmw@aol.com

212138



Classifieds

TIMESHARE FOR SALE

Paradise Beach Villas

1BR wk# 46 \$8500

Phase 2, 2nd floor

Ocean/Pool View

Contact: deleodoors@gmail.com

(stateside)203-558-7592

212141

TIME SHARE FOR RENT

Paradise Villas X-mas

\$850 also Bonaire Flaming

Beach 12/21/28 \$625 Studio

for sale Divi Golf Rm 4201

wk 35 8/29 - 25 wks left \$1998

Local 565 9394 until 12/21 or

508 651 0016

E-mail: rmwjmw@aol.com

212138



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Boeing capsule launches to wrong orbit, skips space station

By **MARCIA DUNN**

AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla.

(AP) — Boeing's new Starliner capsule ended up in the wrong orbit after lifting off on its first test flight Friday, a blow to the company's effort to launch astronauts for NASA next year.

As the company scrambled to understand what happened, NASA canceled the Starliner's docking with the International Space Station, instead focusing on a hastier than planned return to Earth. The Starliner could parachute into its landing site in the New Mexico desert as early as Sunday.

Officials stressed the capsule was stable and safe, and that had astronauts been aboard, they would have been in no danger. A crew may have been able to take over control and salvage the mission. The problem was with the Starliner's mission clock: It was off-kilter, which delayed timed-commands to put the capsule in the right orbit. Engineers worried the problem could resurface during descent.

It was a major setback for Boeing, which had been hoping to catch up with SpaceX, NASA's other commercial crew provider that successfully completed a similar demonstration last March. SpaceX has one last hurdle — a launch abort test — before carrying two NASA astronauts in its Dragon capsule, possibly by spring.

NASA officials did not think Friday's problem would hold up SpaceX, but said they would need to make sure nothing was in common between the two companies' on-board mission timers. Ground controllers were puzzled over why

the Starliner's timer was not working properly when the capsule separated from the rocket and began fly-

a big chunk of their lives to put Americans back in space from our soil, so it's disappointing for us," Chil-

exploded during a ground test.

The U.S. needs companies competing like this,

pilot astronaut for Boeing and one of the Starliner's key developers.

"This is why we flight test, right? We're trying to get all of the bugs, if you will, out of the system," said Fincke at the briefing. "There's always something."

Built to accommodate seven, the white capsule with black and blue trim will typically carry four or five people. It's 16.5 feet (5 meters) tall with its attached service module and 15 feet (4.5 meters) in diameter.

For the test flight, the Starliner carried Christmas treats and presents for the six space station residents, the original air travel ID card belonging to Boeing's founder and a mannequin, named Rosie after the bicep-flexing riveter of World War II.

The flight was designed to test all systems, from the vibrations and stresses of liftoff to the touchdown at the Army's White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico, with parachutes and air bags to soften the landing. On the eve of the launch, Bridenstine said he's "very comfortable" with Boeing, despite the prolonged grounding of the company's 737 Max jets. The spacecraft and aircraft sides of the company are different, he noted. Boeing has long been involved in NASA's human spacecraft program, from Project Mercury to the shuttle and station programs.

Boeing began preliminary work on the Starliner in 2010. Four years later, Boeing and SpaceX made the final cut. Boeing got more than \$4 billion to develop and fly the Starliner, while SpaceX got \$2.6 billion for a crew-version of its Dragon cargo ship.

On Thursday, Bridenstine said NASA wants to make sure every reasonable precaution is taken with the capsules, designed to be safer than NASA's old shuttles.

"We're talking about human spaceflight," he cautioned. "It's not for the faint of heart. It never has been, and it's never going to be."



In this long exposure photo, the United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket carrying the Boeing Starliner crew capsule lifts off on an orbital flight test to the International Space Station from Space Launch Complex 41 at Cape Canaveral Air Force station, Friday, Dec. 20, 2019, in Cape Canaveral, Fla.

Associated Press

ing freely.

NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said it was too soon to know whether Boeing would need to conduct another orbital test flight without a crew, before flying astronauts. The company had been shooting for its first crew launch by the middle of next year. An additional test flight would almost certainly push the first astronaut flight back.

Boeing's Jim Chilton, a senior vice president, stopped by the Starliner's manufacturing plant at Kennedy Space Center to address employees on his way to a somber news conference.

"These are passionate people who are committing

ton told reporters.

It's been nearly nine years since NASA astronauts have launched from the U.S. The last time was July 8, 2011, when Atlantis — now on display at Kennedy Space Center — made the final space shuttle flight.

Since then, NASA astronauts have traveled to and from the space station via Kazakhstan, courtesy of the Russian Space Agency. The Soyuz rides have cost NASA up to \$86 million apiece.

The space agency handed over station deliveries to private businesses, first cargo and then crews, in order to focus on getting astronauts back to the moon and on to Mars.

Commercial cargo ships took flight in 2012. Crew capsules were more complicated to design and build, and parachute and other technical problems caused repeated delays. Target launch dates starting with 2017 came and went. Last April, a SpaceX crew capsule — the same one that flew to the space station a month earlier —

Bridenstine said Thursday, to drive down launch costs, boost innovation and open space up to more people. He stressed the need for more than one company in case of problems that kept one grounded.

Friday's blastoff from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station started flawlessly as the Atlas V rocket lifted off with the Starliner just before sunrise. But a half-hour into the flight, the trouble became apparent.

Ground controllers tried to send up commands to get the spacecraft in its proper orbit, but the signals did not get there and by then it was too late. The capsule tried to fix its position, burning too much fuel for the spacecraft to safely make it to the space station for a Saturday rendezvous.

All three astronauts assigned to the first Starliner crew were at control centers for the launch: Mike Fincke and Nicole Mann, both with NASA, and Boeing's Chris Ferguson, who commanded the last shuttle mission. He's now a test

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2019 Breakthrough Entertainer: A star-making year for Majors

By JAKE COYLE

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — How is a great actor made? For Jonathan Majors, the 30-year-old breakout star of "The Last Black Man in San Francisco," it started in drama school. It swelled with the discovery of August Wilson. It was provoked by teachers who pushed him to look deeper into himself and into everything around him. But it really began in the pews, listening to his mother, a Methodist pastor, preach.

"My mother's a wordsmith and she was the first person to call me a wordsmith," Majors says. "She was the first person to say, 'You have the gift of gab.' She ordained me a performer, a storyteller."

The education of Majors — where he came from, how he got here — is a point of interest because he so overwhelmingly burst on the scene in 2019, making him an easy choice for one of The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of the Year. Majors' tender and soulful performance as Montgomery Allen in "The Last Black Man in San Francisco" has not only drawn widespread acclaim but brought the eager attention of Spike Lee, Jordan Peele, J.J. Abrams and Jay-Z — all of whom have cast him in upcoming projects. All of this just two years af-



ter his professional debut, three years since his last semester at the Yale School of Drama.

"You just keep your head down," Majors says. "I find if I do get frustrated or antsy it's because I allow ambition to get in. It's something to be wary of for myself. If you trust the seed that's been put in you, a tree just grows. I feel fortunate that as it stands now, the tree in me is to make art and to be an actor."

Majors spoke on a recent trip to New York for the IFP Gotham Awards, where he was a nominee for breakthrough actor (as he also is the Film Independent Spirit Awards). It had to be a brief stay; his schedule

is packed. The day after, Majors would fly back to Atlanta to shoot the Peele-Abrams-produced HBO series "Lovecraft Country," in which he stars as a man traveling the Jim Crow South in search of his missing father. Earlier this year, he spent four months in Southeast Asia shooting Lee's Vietnam drama "Da 5 Bloods." He's also set to star in the Jay-Z produced western "The Harder They Fall." It's not hard to see why. In even smaller parts, like his debut in the Gus Van Sant-produced ABC miniseries "When We Rise" or his Detroit gangster in "White Boy Rick," Majors exudes a singular presence. His characters suggest icebergs,

with unseen depths.

In his shirt pocket, Majors carried a small notebook. It's a habit suggested by a formative drama teacher who instructed him to "write down everything." In it, he pens poetry, observations. He's in that way not so dissimilar from the Montgomery of "The Last Black Man in San Francisco."

The movie, directed by Joe Talbot, is a radiant and melancholic fable about one man's sense of displacement in a rapidly gentrifying San Francisco. It's based on the upbringing of Jimmy Fails, who plays a fictionalized version of himself, in his own big-screen debut. Majors plays his best friend and constant companion,

a fishmonger and a playwright who draws from the dramas and characters around him.

"The fact that he's a young black man and a common outcast was something I could relate to," he continues. "Growing up in Texas and having this need of expression — being called a wimp because I was emotional, getting picked on for blah blah blah. You take that. I took that like: 'It's fine. It's what it is. I survived.' But that became my fuel for my artistry. I saw that immediately with Mont."

Majors was born in California but raised around Texas. His father left at an early age. He calls his mother "my enabler and my protector." Early on, a teacher in an alternative education program exposed Majors to acting, which he continued at the North Carolina School of the Arts. There, in his second year, he played Cory Maxson in "Fences" and the full force of Wilson's work opened up to him. At Yale, he mounted all of Wilson's 10-play cycle. There have been other seminal teachers along the way, including the actor and "Lackawanna Blues" playwright Ruben Santiago-Hudson. But Majors' continuing education is increasingly on the sets and stages he now finds himself — like Spike Lee's. □

Singer Camila Cabello apologizes for past racist language

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Pop singer Camila Cabello is apologizing for past racist language she used on social media.

The Grammy-nominated singer wrote on Wednesday that she is sorry for using offensive and hurtful words on social media as a teen, and now that she is 22, she has grown up.

"When I was younger, I used language that I'm deeply ashamed of and will regret forever," Cabello shared in a lengthy social media post. "I was uneducated and igno-

rant and once I became aware of the history and the weight and the true meaning behind this horrible and hurtful language, I was deeply embarrassed I ever used it."

The former Fifth Harmony singer has been accused of using racial remarks in now deleted Tumblr accounts. This week social media users posted screenshots of Cabello's old and offensive posts, forcing the performer to issue an apology.

"As much as I wish I could, I can't go back in time and change things I said in the

past. But once you know better, you do better and that's all I can do," she continued.

Cabello's hits include "Havana" and "Señorita" with Shawn Mendes. She released a new album early this month.

She closed her statement saying she would use her platform to "speak out about injustice and inequality."

"I'll continue doing that," she wrote. "I can't say enough how deeply sorry and ashamed I feel, and I apologize again from the bottom of my heart." □



This Sept. 12, 2019 file photo shows singer Camila Cabello at the Save the Children's "The Centennial Gala: Changing the World for Children" event in New York.

Associated Press

Andy Serkis on why the world needs a new 'Christmas Carol'

By HILARY FOX

Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Wearing a tall black hat, a heavy mottled fur coat covered in trinkets, a long beard and plenty of hair, Andy Serkis received a round of applause from the crew of "A Christmas Carol" after thanking them for their hard work on the set. An hour later, he emerged clean shaven and delighted to be "derigged" from

his garb as the Spirit of Christmas Past — a pagan-inspired look he describes as "total sensory deprivation." "I don't think I've ever worn such an uncomfortable costume," said Serkis. "The costume's really heavy. I've got an eye which is kind of a milky eye which I have no peripheral vision out of the right-hand side of my face. I've got long fingernails." It didn't help that this festive



This undated photograph provided by FX Networks shows actors Guy Pearce as Ebenezer Scrooge, left, and Andy Serkis in character as the Spirit of Christmas Past in the movie 'A Christmas Carol.' Associated Press

offering was shot during a heat wave in July. Even the colder night shoots were no relief. "I thought, I've got the best costume, I don't need a warm set coat. But then it started raining and I realized when my costume started getting wet, it weighed about five times as much," Serkis said. This new version of "A Christmas Carol," starring Guy Pearce as Ebenezer Scrooge, airs as an FX Original Movie on Dec. 19, with encores Dec. 22, Dec. 24 and Dec. 25. Serkis, who is perhaps best-known as the actor behind the computer-enhanced character of Gollum in "The Lord of the Rings" and "Hobbit" films, talked to the Associated Press on set in Hertfordshire, England, after wrapping his part in the production of "A Christmas Carol" last summer. He described shaving off the heavy beard as "joyous." "I feel so much better," he said. "My son will speak to me now." Despite the discomfort of his "facial accoutrements," this was a project Serkis couldn't turn down.

Coming from "Peaky Blinders" creator Steven Knight, this version of the classic Charles Dickens story was "plugged into the zeitgeist," Serkis said. The script appealed to him, he said, because although it told the tale "through a 19th century lens, it feels incredibly contemporary — philosophically and emotionally and politically." "Everything is transactional in the world of Scrooge. Everything has a currency and a value and a monetary value. So, I think that sort of ultra or uber capitalist view is very much what Steven has been trying to grapple with," Serkis said. Serkis loves Dickens and isn't surprised there have been so many screen versions of his work. "At the end of the day, who needs another Christmas Carol?" he asked. "There's so many 'Christmas Carols' and there's so many versions of every Dickens story. But when you have a production company and a writer and a creative team that have such a unique and specific take on the source material, then it's something you'd love to be involved in for sure."

Also on the set, Pearce's Scrooge looked pale, tormented by his past. In his hand-sewn, Victorian-tailored costume, he looked quite different from the stripy bed socks, night cap and comedic grumpy demeanor of many other interpretations. Serkis thinks Pearce's portrayal is something fresh. "He's so wary of the cliché of presenting a Dickensian character. He wants him to be totally emotionally truthful, very, very subtly pulled back. It's a tightrope, but he's avoided all of the trappings of any version of this character I've seen before. He's really very mean-spirited, yet still, a grain of you feels some empathy toward him, even though he's incredibly hard and refuses to be drawn into any kind of an emotional release," Serkis said. As for modern-day parallels, when asked which political figures could benefit from Dickens' lesson on altruism, Serkis laughs. "I don't think the imagination has to stray too far really ... There are quite a few who could do with having the mirror held up to themselves, put it that way."

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Q&A: Anthony Daniels talks long ride as C-3PO in 'Star Wars'

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr.
LOS ANGELES (AP) —

Anthony Daniels went through a painful experience after not receiving the same amount of public recognition as other co-stars when the first "Star Wars" film was released in 1977.

But in time, Daniels' C-3PO character became one of the most popular in the franchise and he's the only cast member to have appeared in all nine of the main "Star Wars" films. The British actor plays the soft-spoken "protocol droid" built by young Anakin Skywalker that is fluent in six million languages. His gold-plated character also appeared in the franchise's spin-off "Rogue One," and had a cameo in "Ralph Breaks the Internet."

C-3PO's witty exchanges with fellow droid R2-D2 often served as comic relief, making the tandem fan favorites.

It's been a long ride for the 73-year-old Daniels, who believes his appearance in "The Rise of Skywalker," which opens in theaters Friday, will likely be his last film appearance as C-3PO. He



This Dec. 3, 2019 photo shows Joonas Suotamo, left, and Anthony Daniels posing for a portrait to promote their film "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker" in Pasadena, Calif.

Associated Press

highlights his "Star Wars" experiences in his new memoir "I Am C-3PO: The Inside Story," which was released in late October.

In a recent interview, Daniels spoke with The Associated Press about playing C-3PO and reflects on some of the best memories in the past 42 years in the iconic franchise.

AP: What has it been like to be in all nine films?

DANIELS: It's been a ton of work, and a ton of employment, which is great. As an actor, you're always looking for the next job. And often that next job for me has been something to do with "Star Wars." The friendship and companionship of be-

ing C-3PO has been quite a gift.

AP: Are you surprised "Star Wars" made it this far?

DANIELS: At the end of "A New Hope," the original film, I thought that was it. Twelve weeks of weird and difficult work. Not entirely wonderful. I thought that was it. Then they came and said "Let's make another

one, then another." ... So I've been swept along by forces beyond my control. But finally, it is ending.

AP: Is "A New Hope" your favorite film compared to the rest?

DANIELS: Yes, because I understood it. The story was simple enough that I got it. It got a bit complicated after that. It was an innocent film out of nowhere.

AP: It was your favorite film, but you struggled with being overlooked after "Star Wars" release as well, right?

DANIELS: It was difficult not being associated with the film when it first came out. That was a painful experience that lasted quite a while, but then changed over the course in time. It brings me here today with my name on the poster. Only parents care about that sort of thing.

AP: What has been your most memorable experience?

DANIELS: In the desert on the first episode. It was absolutely riveting. It had such an impact. Seeing the effect of people looking at me in the costume then seeing their reactions. □

High school coach portrayed in 'Remember the Titans' dies

By TOM FOREMAN Jr.
Associated Press

With his health declining, Herman Boone was still mapping out football strategy as if he were about to walk the sidelines one more time.

"His daughter said the other night he asked for a clipboard. He started drawing plays," said Aly Khan Johnson, an assistant on Boone's staff in 1972.

Boone, the Virginia high school football coach who inspired the movie "Remember the Titans," died Wednesday after battling cancer. He was 84. Boone guided T.C. Williams High School to a state championship while navigating the early days of desegregation. In the movie, he was portrayed by Denzel Washington.

Johnson said the coach died at his home in Alexan-

dria, Virginia. Johnson said a funeral home operated by his wife is handling the arrangements, which are not complete.

He said Boone had been battling cancer, adding that he visited the coach regularly and had planned to see him Wednesday when he learned of his death.

Johnson recalled Boone as being one of the influential coaches in his career and a person after whom he tried to model his own style. Their association went back to the 1960s, when Boone coached at a black high school in Williamston, North Carolina, and Johnson lived several doors down. He said they would sometimes run plays that Boone had drawn up.

"What I picked up from coach Boone all those years was his dedication to



This 1971 file photo shows Alexandria, Va.'s, T.C. Williams High School football coach Herman Boone, right, during a break at summer camp, with guard Johnny Colantuoni, (62) and John Vaughn, center.

Associated Press

young people, being organized and being persistent in doing what you're doing, planning ahead," Johnson said.

Johnson said he lived with Boone for a month after he

graduated from college and recalls how the two would analyze the team.

"I'd watch him take the projector out, point it at the bathroom wall, review plays and so forth, until late

at night," he said. "You saw that dedication."

The Rocky Mount, North Carolina-born Boone led undefeated Williams to the state championship in 1971. His team and its initial success was also recognized as a galvanizing factor in helping bring the city through school consolidation.

Much of "Remember the Titans" covers the team's uphill battle to win the state championship over 15 all-white teams. They have to overcome vindictive opponents, racist coaches and crooked referees.

"When I got there, you saw kids work together, hung out together," Johnson said. "It was a brotherhood that you would see. As you know, athletics does something for a community, and it happened at the right time for that community." □

'Shop early': US Christmas trees supplies tight, prices up

By JOHN RABY

Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) —

Customers searching for the perfect Christmas tree typically glance at Sandy Parsons' limited offerings, then keep walking.

Parsons never got her order for 350 trees from a North Carolina farm. Supplies were short, she was told. Instead, she was shipped some smaller ones for her lot at the Capitol Market in Charleston. Those paled in comparison to the much taller beauties at a competitor's lot next door.

"This has been the worst season," Parsons said. "We lost a lot of money by that. It sets you back two or three years."

Christmas tree supplies are tight again this year across the United States, depending upon location and seller. The industry is still bouncing back from the Great Recession and trying to win people back from a shift toward artificial trees when times were especially tough.

Industry officials say not to worry: Everyone who wants a last-minute tree should be able to find one. It just might take a little more searching, especially if customers want a specific type, and you might have to pay a little more.

The best advice, said Amy Start, executive director of the Michigan Christmas Tree Association, is simple: "Shop early."



In this Nov. 29, 2018, file photo, Tommy Lee, a sixth-generation tree farmer at Lee Farms in Tualatin, Ore., helps Jason Jimenez and his sons carry the Douglas fir they selected off the tree lot.

Associated Press

Parsons has been in business for 42 years as a seasonal seller of flowers, produce, pumpkins — and this year, just 32 Christmas trees. "I can tell you how many I didn't buy: 350," said Parsons, whose disappointment has been tempered by robust wreath sales.

In the next lot, Robert Cole was having a jolly ole time preparing an abundance of trees for loading onto customers' vehicles.

The difference? Cole's lot, French Creek Farms of Buckhannon, grows its own trees.

Gesturing toward the lots of Parsons and another competitor, he explained his brisk business in the simplest economic terms: "Because there's been no trees here and no trees over there."

An oversupply of trees about a decade ago caused a domino effect nationwide. Subsequently, fewer trees were cut down, which meant not as many seedlings were planted to replace them. Hot, dry weather also took its toll, forcing many growers to close.

Larry Smith, who has been selling Fraser firs from the same lot in Lenoir, North Carolina, for 40 years, and second-generation Christmas tree farmer Mike Rood of Hermann, Missouri, said some farmers' adult children aren't as eager to take over the family business, leading to a labor shortage.

"A lot of the farmers have gotten older and their kids realize there's an easier way to life," Smith said.

Despite such challenges, Smith isn't looking for other ways to make a living.

"I hope they find me fell over dead in the tree patch," he said. "That's the way I really want to go."

Smith's trees have graced homes across the North Carolina foothills and up to the White House. He said he's having his best year ever and doesn't foresee running out. When his supply dwindles, his team heads up the mountain to harvest more.

In Missouri, Rood buys pre-cut trees not native to the state to supplement the short supply. This year, his farm couldn't buy as many taller trees as it wanted.

"The bigger trees in particular at this stage in the game are going to be harder to find," Rood said. "So they

need to be aware that if they're really looking for a big tree, they need to go out and find it pretty quickly."

Missouri Christmas Tree Association President Steve Meier said that by late December, "there's still going to be Christmas trees left that haven't been chosen." The supply issue goes all the way up the chain.

Oregon has the highest annual production of Christmas trees, followed by North Carolina and Michigan. In Oregon, where some tree farms comprise thousands of acres, Kirchem Farm owner Cher Tollefson in Oregon City closed her 100-acre business this holiday season for the first time in nearly three decades, citing a lack of trees.

"Our trees need a year to grow," Tollefson said.

The number of Christmas tree farms nationwide fell 3% between 2012 and 2017, the latest year available, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. According to the National Christmas Tree Association, a real tree last year cost \$78 on average, up \$3 from 2017.

At the Charleston market, customer Bob Atkins of Madison noticed not only that prices are higher but "there's not as many as usual."

He was near the point of settling for an artificial tree when he and his wife, Jane, found the right tree after about 20 minutes on Cole's lot.

"I do not want an artificial tree," Jane Atkins said with a smile. "We will fight over that!"

Artificial Christmas trees now represent 70% of all trees in U.S. homes. The Denver-based National Christmas Tree Association is trying to change that, mainly by appealing to a sense of tradition among millennials.

"Young families are our bread and butter," said Doug Hundley, the group's spokesman. "It's important to that group of adults to have that real tree experience." □



In this Sept. 27, 2017, file photo, fog drifts through a Christmas tree farm near Starks Mountain in Fryeburg, Maine.

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